

16 August 2018

TURKMENISTAN: Now eight jailed conscientious objectors

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

With two jailings in August, eight conscientious objectors aged 18 to 24 are now serving labour camp terms of one to two years. Forum 18 could not reach Human Rights Ombudsperson Yazdursun Gurbannazarova to ask why young men are jailed for refusing military service on grounds of conscience.

Two more conscientious objectors were jailed in August for refusing compulsory military service on grounds of conscience. The two young men – both Jehovah's Witnesses – were each given one-year ordinary regime labour camp terms.

The jailing of Isa Sayayev and Ruslan Artykmuradov brings to eight the number of conscientious objectors known to be serving prison terms in Turkmenistan for refusing compulsory military service. The youngest three are aged 18 and the oldest 24. Seven – including the two new prisoners - are serving one-year jail terms and the eighth a two-year sentence (see list at foot of article).

In addition to the two August jailings, two conscientious objectors were jailed in January, one in June and three in July (see F18News 30 July 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2400).

Forum 18 again tried to call the Human Rights Ombudsperson Yazdursun Gurbannazarova, who was named by the government-appointed parliament, to find out why young men are being jailed for refusing military service on grounds of conscience. However, her assistant told Forum 18 on 15 August that she was on a work trip to Dashoguz Region and would not be back in the office until 17 August. Her mobile phone went unanswered on 15 and 16 August.

No conscientious objection, no alternative service

In defiance of repeated calls by the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Turkmenistan offers no alternative to its compulsory military service. Military service for men between the ages of 18 and 27 is generally two years (see F18News 30 July 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2400).

Young men who refuse military service on grounds of conscience face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1. This punishes refusal to serve in the armed forces in peacetime with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment or two years' corrective labour.

From 2014, courts punished conscientious objectors with corrective labour or suspended prison terms, rather than imprisonment. However, jailings resumed with the two prison terms in January 2018 (see F18News 23 March 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2363).

Dashoguz Region: Another one year jail term

After Isa Sayayev refused military service on grounds of conscience, Prosecutors in Dashoguz Region brought a case against the 24-year-old Jehovah's Witness under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1.

On 9 August, a judge at Koneurgench City Court found Sayayev guilty and jailed him for one year in an ordinary regime labour camp, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Sayayev had not been under arrest in the run-up to the trial. He was arrested in the court room after the verdict was handed down. He was taken to the DZ-D/7 detention centre in the city of Dashoguz.

On 13 August, Sayayev lodged an appeal against his conviction to Dashoguz Regional Court.

Lebap Region: Another one year jail term

After Ruslan Artykmuradov refused military service on grounds of conscience, Prosecutors in Lebap Region brought a case against the 18-year-old Jehovah's Witness under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1.

On 13 August, Judge S. Gurbanov at Sayat District Court found Artykmuradov guilty and jailed him for one year in an ordinary regime labour camp, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Artykmuradov had not been under arrest in the run-up to the trial. He was arrested in the court room after the verdict was handed down. He was taken to the LB-D/9 detention centre in the city of Turkmenabad.

Artykmuradov is preparing an appeal against his conviction to Lebap Regional Court.

Six jailed conscientious objectors in one labour camp

If they lose their appeals, Sayayev and Artykmuradov are likely to be sent to serve their sentences at the ordinary regime labour camp LB-K/12 in the desert near Seydi, in Lebap Region. Many other prisoners of conscience jailed to punish them for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief have been held in the camp.

The six conscientious objectors sentenced between January and July - Arslan Begenchov, Kerven Kakabayev, Mekan Annayev, Ikhlosbek Rozmetov, Veniamin Genjiyev and Maksat Jumadurdiyev – are already serving their sentences at the Seydi camp.

Also held at Seydi Labour Camp is fellow Jehovah's Witness Bahram Hemdemov. He was arrested during a March 2015 raid on his home, after which he was tortured. He is serving a four year prison term from 19 May 2015 on charges of allegedly inciting religious hatred, which he strongly denies, but his real "crime" seems to have been hosting a meeting for worship (see F18News 5 April 2016 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2164).

The address of the Seydi Labour Camp is:

746222 Lebap velayat

Seydi

uchr. LB-K/12

Turkmenistan

List of known jailed conscientious objectors

Eight conscientious objectors to compulsory military service (listed below) – all of them Jehovah's Witnesses – are known to be serving prison sentences under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1:

- 1) Arslan Begenchovich Begenchov; born 15 May 1999; sentenced 17 January 2018 Charjew District Court; appeal rejected 13 February 2018 Lebap Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 2) Kerven Arslanovich Kakabayev; born 9 September 1996; sentenced 29 January 2018 Koneurgench City Court; appeal denied due to missed appeal deadline 27 June 2018 Dashoguz Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 3) Mekan Orazdurdiyevich Annayev; born 22 June 1999; sentenced 26 June 2018 Turkmenbashi City Court; no appeal to Balkan Region Court; two year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 4) Ikhlosbek Valijon oglu Rozmetov; born 26 November 1997; sentenced 11 July 2018 Gurbansoltan eje District Court; appeal rejected 23 July 2018 Dashoguz Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 5) Veniamin Muslimovich Genjiyev; born 12 May 2000; sentenced 17 July 2018 Danew District Court; no appeal to Lebap Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 6) Maksat Jumadurdiyevich Jumadurdiyev; born 15 May 2000; sentenced 17 July 2018 Danew District Court; no appeal to Lebap Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 7) Isa Muslimovich Sayayev; born 14 May 1994; sentenced 9 August 2018 Koneurgench City Court; appeal lodged to Dashoguz Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.
- 8) Ruslan Khadynyaz oglu Artykmuradov; born 24 May 2000; sentenced 13 August 2018 Sayat District Court; appeal in preparation to Lebap Regional Court; one year ordinary regime labour camp.

(END)

For a personal commentary by a Protestant within Turkmenistan, on the fiction - despite government claims - of religious freedom in

the country, and how religious communities and the international community should respond to this, see http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=728.

For a personal commentary by another Turkmen Protestant, arguing that "without freedom to meet for worship it is impossible to claim that we have freedom of religion or belief," see http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1128.

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Turkmenistan can be found at <http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=32>.

For more background information see Forum 18's religious freedom survey of Turkmenistan at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=2244.

A compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments can be found at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1351.

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