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Confined to a psychiatric hospital for talking to a radio station

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Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that **Amangelen Shapudakov**, an 80-year-old activist, has been confined to a psychiatric hospital after accusing a local government official of corruption in an interview for [Radio Azatlyk](#), the Turkmen-language service of [Radio Free Europe \(RFE\)](#), one of the few independent media still operating in Turkmenistan.

"The inhuman and arbitrary way that Shapudakov is being treated is new evidence of this central Asian dictatorship's harsh repression of the media and their sources," the press freedom organization said.

"Shapudakov has never had psychiatric problems, but he suffers from diabetes and hypertension. It is criminal to lock up someone of his age with these ailments. Such methods worthy of a bygone age are used not only against journalists but also against the people they talk to on a regular or occasional basis."

Shapudakov was summoned to a police station in Magtymguly, the southwestern district where he lives, on 7 March and has not been seen since. A spokesperson at a psychiatric hospital in the nearby city of Balkanabat told [Radio Azatlyk](#) that he had been committed for medical examinations and would remain there for about a month.

Turkmenistan's psychiatric hospitals are notorious for being used as "[gulag](#)" to confine and torture government critics and opponents.

Shapudakov was banned from leaving Magtymguly in January and posters accusing him of being a criminal were put up in public places. He was briefly detained in Ashgabat on 5 February after complaining to several international organizations of being harassed by the Turkmen authorities.

[RFE](#) contributors are frequently subjected to [threats and harassment](#). One of the gravest cases was **Ogusulpar Muradova's** [death while being tortured](#) in prison in September 2006. Two of her colleagues, **Annakurban Amanklychev** and **Sapardurdy Khajiyev**, are still being held.

As Reporters Without Borders reported at the time, **Sazak Durdymuradov**, an occasional contributor to [Radio Azatlyk](#), was held in a psychiatric hospital for [two weeks in 2008](#). Several [RFE](#) journalists were interrogated last year and their family members were put on a black-list.

Access to information is totally blocked in Turkmenistan, which ranks 176th out of 178 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#). Despite a change of tone on the part of the government, Shapudakov's confinement shows that even talking to journalists continues to be very dangerous.

(Photo: Azathabar, Radio Free Europe/ radio Liberty)
