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Ukraine: Authorities must not return former Tajik Prime Minister to torture in Tajikistan

Amnesty International has written to the Ukrainian authorities urging them not to return former Prime Minister Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov to Tajikistan where he would be at risk of torture and other grave human rights violations. Amnesty International is also urging the Ukrainian authorities to immediately release Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov.

Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov was arrested in Borispol International Airport in Ukraine on 5 February as he flew in from the United States. Amnesty International is concerned that, if extradited to Tajikistan, Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov will face unfair trial and be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. The organisation has called on the Ukrainian authorities to refuse any request from the Tajikistani authorities to extradite Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov, and to grant Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov access to a fair and impartial asylum procedure.

Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov served as Prime Minister of Tajikistan in 1992-3 during the civil war, and is a prominent opposition leader. In 1997 he was accused of crimes including participating in organised crime and terrorism, in particular of supporting the actions of Colonel Makmud Khudoiberdiev in the north of Tajikistan in 1998 as part of the ongoing struggle for power which had its roots in the civil war. Abdulmalik Abdullodzhonov denies these charges and was granted political asylum in the US in June 1999.

In advance of presidential elections in November this year, the Tajikistani authorities have been escalating their campaign to silence all critical voices including through harassment, shutting down organizations and websites, and seeking extradition of opposition members.

Torture is pervasive in Tajikistan and in November 2012, the UN Committee against Torture noted “numerous and consistent allegations ... of routine use of torture and ill-treatment of suspects, principally to extract confessions”. Reports of the torture methods include the use of electric shocks, boiling water, suffocation, beatings, and burning with cigarettes. There were reports of rape and threats of rape in relation to female and male detainees, as well as psychological torture.

As a party to the Refugee Convention, the Convention against Torture and the European Convention on Human Rights Ukraine should not return anybody to a country where they could face a serious risk of torture or other grave human rights abuses.

Amnesty International has repeatedly found it necessary to remind the Ukrainian authorities of their international human rights obligations not to return anybody to a country where they would be at risk of torture. The organization has also written to the Ukrainian authorities regarding an asylum-seeker from Uzbekistan who is currently under threat of return to Uzbekistan.