

TAKE ACTION: Please cut and paste this letter onto your personal or Institutional letterhead calling for the release from prison of journalist Umida Niyazova.

04 May 2007

Islam A. Karimov
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
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Tashkent
Uzbekistan
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Excellency,

I wish to add my name to this appeal from PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of the international writers' organization, International PEN. PEN Canada considers the conviction of Umida Niyazova to be in blatant violation of her right to freedom of expression and calls for her immediate and unconditional release.

On 1 May, Niyazova, age 32, was sentenced to seven years in prison by Sergely District Court in Tashkent; the trial was barred to the press and public. She was convicted on charges of smuggling banned materials into Uzbekistan, using foreign aid to distribute material that threatens Uzbek national security, and illegally crossing the border with Kyrgystan. These accusations are clearly linked to Niyazova's legitimate work as a human rights activist and journalist. Those related to smuggling and distribution refer to her reports on human rights abuses, notably on the May 2005 Andijon massacre. She is a reporter on politics and human rights for the Central Asia website, Oasis, as well as for the Moscow-based Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations. She has also worked for Human Rights Watch, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Freedom House and Internews.

At the trial Niyazova's lawyer, Tatiana Davydova was only given 30 minutes notice of the final hearing, thus not allowing for her to prepare for the hearing, and giving insufficient time for diplomatic and other observers to get to the court room. Davydova stated that the only offence that her client had committed was to enter Uzbekistan without proper papers, a crime that is usually punished under administrative, not criminal, legislation.

From her arrest on 22 January 2007, there have been acute concerns for Niyazova's well-being. An alert issued by the Committee to Protect Journalists on 12 April 2007, reports fears that Niyazova's health is deteriorating. Her sister visited Niyazova in February, and noted that she appeared distressed and had lost weight. She was said to have been subjected to sleep deprivation, being allowed only 3-4 hours of sleep a day. A single mother, Niyazova has expressed her anxieties for the welfare of her two-year-old son.

PEN Canada expresses profound shock at the seven year sentence served against Umida Niyazova solely for her work as a journalist and human rights defender. The sentence is in direct violation of her right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Uzbekistan is a State Party. PEN Canada is calling for Umida Niyazova's immediate and unconditional release.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

Copies to:
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Please send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

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