

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION



Mamadali Makhmudov is a well-known writer and member of the Uzbek Writers Union and Uzbek Cultural Foundation. His first major work, *Immortal Cliffs*, was first published in 1981. Literary experts discovered an anti-Soviet message and government officials pressured Makhmudov to "repudiate" the book. He did so, in the mid-1980s, by issuing an opaque statement. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Makhmudov became less marginalized and in 1992 he was awarded the Cholpan Prize for *Immortal Cliffs*.

Makhmudov's troubles with the Uzbekistani government began in 1994. He was arrested when a firearm was produced in a raid of his home under allegations of "terrorism". The charges were received with general disbelief and dropped. Makhmudov was next charged with embezzlement and abuse of his position as chairman of the Cultural Foundation and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Human rights groups investigated the matter and deemed the charges to be false. A successful international campaign was launched and Makhmudov was released early as part of a presidential amnesty.

Makhmudov was taken into custody in February 1999 and taken to an unknown location. He "re-appeared" in May and was charged with threatening the president and constitutional order. These charges appear to be based on the evidence that he possessed copies of the banned *Erk* newspaper, voice of the banned Erk political party, and because of his association with writer Muhammad Salih, Erk's exiled leader. The trial was "99-per cent closed" and Makhmudov was sentenced to 14 years in prison. In a letter smuggled from the courtroom, Makhmudov alleged that he had been repeatedly tortured while in prison.

While in prison, Makhmudov has had three heart attacks and his health is very poor. He was transferred from Navoi prison to the medical centre at Tashkent prison around March 2001. Makhmudov was subsequently moved to Chirchik prison, where the conditions are said to be less harsh than at Navoi. The latest information, obtained in June 2006, was that Makhmudov's condition had taken a turn for the worse.

PEN Canada believes that Mamadali Makhmudov has been convicted in violation of his right to freedom of expression and association as guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Uzbekistan has ratified. PEN Canada calls for his immediate and unconditional release and that he receive the necessary medical attention.

Please send appeals to:

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