

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION



Muhammad Bekzhon was deported from Ukraine in March 1999 on accusation of involvement in a series of explosions in Tashkent. Several others were arrested in connection with these events, including writer Mamadali Makhmudov. It is thought that Bekzhon's arrest is linked to his association with the exiled opposition leader Muhammed Salih (his brother) and that the charges are linked to his work on *Erk*, the opposition party's newspaper, although it has been banned since 1994. Some of the defendants testified to having been tortured under interrogation including beatings, electric shock and threat of rape of female family members.

Bekzhon was sentenced to 15 years in prison in March 1999. His sentence is set to expire in March 2014. He is held in Kagan Prison in Bukhara. There are concerns that Bekzhon has been tortured. Relatives who visited in early 2001 claim to have been alarmed by his state of health and reported that he required crutches. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture in his 2003 report referred to allegations of torture resulting in Bekzhon's leg being broken. It referred to Bekzhon contracting tuberculosis, for which he received treatment. The Uzbek government responded to the Rapporteur, informing him that Bekzhon's sentence had been reduced by a fifth, and giving details of the TB treatment being given. It denied that "moral or physical pressure" had been applied.

On June 18, 2003, representatives from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) were permitted to visit Muhammad Bekzhon in a prison hospital in Tashkent - his first interview since he was imprisoned. He told the IWPR that, as a result of beatings received in prison, he was deaf in his right ear and his leg was broken.

PEN Canada reminds the Uzbek authorities of their commitments to the principles of freedom of expression, of religion and the right not to be subject to torture as guaranteed by the Uzbek Constitution, the United Nations International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture, to which Uzbekistan is a state party. We call on authorities to carry out an exhaustive investigation into the allegations of torture against Muhammad Bekzhon and prosecute anyone found responsible in an effort to end this practice. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Please send appeals to:

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