

# URGENT ACTION

## JOURNALIST AT RISK OF FURTHER JAIL TIME

**Journalist Muhammad Bekzhanov, aged 62, who is scheduled to be released in January after spending more than 17 years in prison on politically motivated charges, has been put in a punishment cell. In Uzbekistan, this is the usual practice before the authorities arbitrarily extend prisoner's sentence.**

On 13 December, a relative of **Muhammad Bekzhanov** went to Zarafshan prison in Navoi region, southwestern Uzbekistan, to visit him a final time before his release. Muhammad Bekzhanov, aged 62, has almost completed his arbitrarily extended sentence and is scheduled to be released in January. However, prison officials told the relative that the visit was cancelled because Muhammad Bekzhanov was in a punishment cell. The prison authorities did not provide any explanation for why he was in a punishment cell and told the relative to come back after 10 January.

This would not be the first time that an alleged violation of prison rules has been used to punish Muhammad Bekzhanov. In January 2012, a month before his scheduled release, he was sentenced to a further four years and eight months in prison for allegedly violating prison rules. Family members reported that Muhammad Bekzhanov told the court that he had not infringed a single prison rule in 13 years and that it was strange that he should start breaking rules just weeks before his scheduled release. An appeal court upheld the additional sentence in March 2012.

Muhammad Bekzhanov has spent the last 17 years in prison. At his trial in 1999 he stated that he had been tortured into confessing to fabricated charges. He stated that he had been beaten with rubber truncheons, suffocated, and given electric shocks. The court dismissed his torture allegations. To date, no investigation has been carried out into his claims and no perpetrators have been identified and brought to justice.

Muhammad Bekzhanov is one of the world's longest-imprisoned journalists.

### Please write immediately in Uzbek, Russian, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Muhammad Bekzhanov is released on his scheduled release date;
- Raising concern about the widely-used practice in Uzbekistan of arbitrarily extending prison sentences, including in Muhammad Bekzhanov's case in 2012, on the pretext of alleged violations of prison rules.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 JANUARY 2017 TO:

President  
Shavkat Mirziyoyev  
Rezidentsia prezidenta  
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Tashkent 700163  
Uzbekistan  
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Email: [presidents\\_office@press-service.uz](mailto:presidents_office@press-service.uz)  
Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Mirziyoyev/?fref=ts>

**Salutation: Dear President**

Prosecutor General  
Ihtior Abdullaev  
Prosecutor General's Office of  
Uzbekistan  
ul. Gulyamova 66  
Tashkent 700047  
Uzbekistan  
Fax: +998 71 133 3917  
Email: [prokuratura@lawyer.uz](mailto:prokuratura@lawyer.uz)  
**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General**

**And copies to:**  
Minister of Internal Affairs  
Adham Ahmedbaev  
Ministry of Internal Affairs  
ul. Junus Rajabiy 1  
Tashkent 100029  
Uzbekistan  
Fax: +998 71 233 6646  
Email: [info@mvd.uz](mailto:info@mvd.uz)

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** HIS EXCELLENCY MR OTABEK AKBAROV, Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 41 Holland Park W11 3RP, 020 7229 7679, Fax 020 7229 7029, [info@uzbekembassy.org](mailto:info@uzbekembassy.org), [www.uzbekembassy.org](http://www.uzbekembassy.org)

**Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.**

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Muhammad Bekzhanov, the-Editor-in-Chief of the banned Erk political opposition party newspaper, left Uzbekistan in 1993 due to persecution, harassment and intimidation by the authorities in connection to his association with Erk.

On 16 February 1999 six bombs exploded in Tashkent. Thirteen people died and more than 100 were injured. In the aftermath, the Uzbekistani security forces arbitrarily detained hundreds of alleged suspects, including members of independent Islamic congregations, and members and supporters of banned political opposition parties and movements and their families.

Muhammad Bekzhanov was forcibly returned to Uzbekistan from Ukraine on 18 March 1999, following the Tashkent bombings. He was held incommunicado until the end of April 1999.

During his trial in August 1999, Muhammad Bekzhanov issued a statement together with his five co-defendants, alleging that they had been tortured in pre-trial detention in order to force them to “confess” to fabricated charges that implicated him in the February 1999 bombing, and also implicated the exiled Erk leader Muhammad Salih. Muhammad Bekzhanov alleged, among other things, that he had been beaten with rubber truncheons and plastic bottles filled with water, suffocated, and given electric shocks. After his testimony the trial judge gave the defence lawyers just 40 minutes for the presentation of their case. The court did not take into account any of Muhammad Bekzhanov’s allegations of torture or forced confession and based its verdict on his confession. On 18 August 1999, the court sentenced him to 15 years in prison for his alleged participation in the February 1999 bombings.

In Uzbekistan it is a common practice to use alleged violations of prison rules to extend prison sentences under Article 221 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “disobedience to legitimate orders of administration of penal institutions”. Article 221 punishes prisoners for committing infractions of the prison rules by imposing further terms of imprisonment of up to five years at a time, which may happen repeatedly. There are no publicly available official lists of prison rules and enforcement of such rules often appears to be arbitrary and politically-motivated.

Certain categories of prisoners, such as human rights defenders, government critics and individuals convicted of membership of Islamist parties and groups or Islamic movements banned in Uzbekistan, are often subjected to severe punishment regimes in prisons where they serve their sentences, and have their sentences extended for long periods even for alleged minor infractions of the prison rules. For example, they are often put into punishment cells (called SHIZO – from the Russian “shtrafnoi izoliator”), which have been described by former prisoners as small, often windowless rooms made of concrete, with no heating, no natural light or ventilation and too small for a bed. Prisoners are often denied adequate medical care and forced to work long hours doing physically demanding manual labour such as construction or making bricks, with basic tools, inadequate clothing, no protective gear, and little food and water. Former prisoners and prisoners’ relatives report frequent beatings and other ill-treatment by prison guards and other prisoners.