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Torture, no pardon, for prisoner of conscience

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (21.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2wGAred> - Officials from the southern Kashkadarya Region – possibly from the SSS secret police – arrived at the Labour Camp in Bukhara Region where Muslim prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov is being held. They tortured him over a period of six hours on 17 April and threatened to extend his 16-year jail term. They were trying to extract false testimony against a distant relative who has lived outside Uzbekistan since 2006. Tursunov refused to sign the pre-prepared statement.

The 44-year-old Tursunov is serving a 16 year sentence imposed in 2013 for meeting without state permission with other Muslims to study the Koran and pray. His family have since March 2018 been seeking a pardon for him (see below).

Since April 2018, Tursunov's family have been trying to convince him to write to the President for a pardon, a relative told Forum 18. But Korovulbazar Labour Camp officers told him that "even if you write a letter it will not help you. No one will release you." The officials also laughed at him for thinking that he could be pardoned. Due to the officials' behaviour, including torturing him on 17 April 2019, relatives say that Tursunov thinks there is no point in applying for a pardon (see below).

Officials – possibly from the SSS secret police – tried to get him to sign false statements against a distant relative, Bayramali Yusupov. Yusupov has been in exile since 2006 after criminal charges were brought against him for having attended a Turkish-run school and being active in mosques. He has been seeking a guarantee that he can return without being prosecuted, but the regime will not grant this. "In March and April 2019 up to 20 Muslim men were questioned about me, some of whom are serving prison terms," Yusupov told Forum 18 (see below).

Exiled human rights defender Mutabar Tajibayeva of Fiery Hearts told Forum 18 that she thought that "the authorities are afraid that if Yusupov comes back to Uzbekistan he will speak about many of their crimes against innocent Muslims" (see below).

Tursunov was "beaten and put under psychological pressure" over about six hours on 17 April 2019, a relative told Forum 18. Tursunov was "pressured to sign statements against Yusupov that the officials had prepared in advance, and threatened that his Labour Camp sentence would be extended unless he signs". However, despite the torture, Tursunov did not sign the pre-prepared statements (see below).

Despite numerous complaints from the family, and contrary to the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, no officials have been arrested or prosecuted for torturing Tursunov. Forum 18 is aware of other cases where officials who have acted illegally also apparently enjoy impunity. No official has been prepared to talk to Forum 18 about the impunity torturers enjoy (see below).

Elsewhere, Jahongir Kulijanov, a Shia Muslim from Bukhara has been freed on parole. He was among 20 Shias detained in Bukhara in February 2017 and tortured. Kulijanov was jailed for five years in September 2017 for having works on Shia history on his mobile phone (see below).

Kulijanov must give the regime 20 per cent of any salary he earns, report to police weekly, cannot leave his home town without police permission, and must not leave Uzbekistan, relatives who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. His parole will end in 2022 when his Labour Camp sentence ends. Police allow him to attend a mosque, but relatives pointed out "unless the authorities decide that it is lawful to read Shia history on the internet, we cannot do this" (see below).

The state Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent told Forum 18 that it does not know whether any texts about Shia Islam are legally available in the country (see below).

Illegally extradited, jailed for 16 years, exposed to TB

Kazakhstan illegally extradited Khayrullo Turdiyevich Tursunov (born 4 April 1975) to Uzbekistan in March 2013. He was sentenced in June 2013 to 16 years in jail for meeting privately with other Muslims without state permission to study the Koran and pray. Shortly after his sentence, Tursunov was apparently deliberately exposed by the regime to the potentially fatal disease of tuberculosis.

Tursunov's health has given concern to his relatives throughout his imprisonment, and in 2016 he was apparently tortured. "Khayrullo was either tortured in prison or is in deep depression, his sisters did not know the exact reasons," Tursunov's relatives outside Uzbekistan told Forum 18 in February 2016. "But he sounded like he was saying his last goodbye to his sisters because he thought the end of his life is coming."

Tursunov's state of health later improved. But relatives told Forum 18 on 20 May 2019 that he appears to be suffering from stomach problems, for which he needs medicine relatives buy him.

"No one will release you"

Following the release in 2018 of some prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion and belief, Tursunov's family hoped that he too could be freed. From March 2018 onwards, relatives asked the regime, including the prison and the Interior Ministry, to free him. One of his sisters, Mukaddas Tursunova, also phoned President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's office.

Both the Interior Ministry and the President's office stated that Tursunov himself must personally write an appeal for a pardon to President Mirziyoyev.

Tursunova wrote to the Interior Ministry asking whether her brother had been told he had to ask for a pardon himself. The Interior Ministry's Deputy Chief of Staff A. Kodyrov wrote back on 18 April 2018 saying that officials had told Tursunov of this.

On 18 April Korovulbazar Labour Camp officers Captain A. Latipov, Senior Lieutenant B. Jamolov, and Lieutenant F. Shabanov notified Tursunov of this in writing. "However these Labour Camp officials told Khayrullo that this is just a formality," a relative told Forum 18. "Even if you write a letter it will not help you. No one will release you." Officials also laughed at Tursunov for thinking that he could be pardoned.

Since April 2018 Tursunov's family have been trying to convince him to write to the President for a pardon, a relative told Forum 18. However, due to the behaviour of officials (for example torturing him – see below) Tursunov does not think there is any point in doing this.

Tursunov's Labour Camp address is:

Uzbekistan
Bukhara Region
Korovulbazar sh.
Uchr. UYa-64/25
Tursunov Khayrullo Turdiyevich

Prisoner of conscience tortured

On 17 April 2019 officials from the southern Kashkadarya Region, where Tursunov comes from, questioned and tortured Tursunov in Korovulbazar Labour Camp where he is serving his sentence. The officials tortured him to extract statements from him against a distant relative, Bayramali Yusupov.

Yusupov fled Uzbekistan in 2006 after "extremism" criminal charges were opened against him, he told Forum 18 from exile on 15 May 2019. "I actively attended the Kuk Gumbaz (Blue dome) Mosque of Karshi [Qarshi] and prayed at my work in a Turkish construction company, after gaining my education in a Turkish-run lycee," he stated. "The authorities claimed that almost everyone who finished a Turkish-run school and was active in mosques might be 'extremist'. I was questioned many times, long before they opened a criminal case against me."

Yusupov – like others - has asked to be allowed to return with a guarantee of no prosecution, but the regime has refused to do this. "In March and April 2019, up to 20 Muslim men were questioned about me, some of whom are serving prison terms," he told Forum 18.

Human rights defender Mutabar Tajibayeva of Fiery Hearts told Forum 18 from exile in Paris on 15 May that she thought that "the authorities are afraid that if Yusupov comes back to Uzbekistan he will speak about many of their crimes against innocent Muslims".

Tursunov was over an approximately six hour period on 17 April 2019 "beaten and put under psychological pressure", a relative told Forum 18. Officials pressured Tursunov "to sign statements against Yusupov that the officials had prepared in advance, and threatened that his Labour Camp sentence would be extended unless he signs". However, despite the torture, Tursunov did not sign the pre-prepared statements.

Unfair trials with the use of false evidence are common in Uzbekistan.

The family suspects that the officials were from the State Security Service (SSS) secret police, as it is known that the investigation against Yusupov is being led by Investigator Turgun Umirov of the Kashkadarya Region SSS.

A Kashkadarya SSS secret police officer (who refused to give his name) on 20 May claimed to Forum 18 – after consulting other officials - that it is a "wrong number" as soon as Forum 18 asked about Tursunov and Yusupov.

"How is it possible..?"

During a 2 May visit by relatives to Tursunov they complained to Labour Camp officials about the questioning and torture. "Officials told us that they know nothing about it," they told Forum 18. One relative asked: "How is it possible that officials come and interrogate Khayrullo in the Labour Camp, and the Labour Camp authorities know nothing about it?"

Mukaddas Tursunova, Tursunov's sister, complained about the torture to: the head from February 2019 of the SSS secret police Abdusalom Azizov; parliamentary Human Rights Ombudsperson Ulughbek Mukhamadiyev; Prosecutor General Otabek Murodov; and Interior Minister Pulat Bobojonov, dunyouzbeklari.com noted on 10 May.

Tursunova stated that Tursunov was thinking of writing to ask for a pardon, but after being tortured and interrogated for six hours he does not think he will be pardoned.

She also asked the government to identify the three officials who tortured Tursunov and pressured him to testify against an innocent person, and punish the officials according to the law.

Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Uzbekistan has a binding international legal obligation to arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture, and to try them under criminal law.

An official who refused to give his name who answered the phone of Colonel Bakhrombek Adylov, Deputy Interior Minister and head of the Ministry's Chief Directorate for the Enforcement of Punishments, refused to comment on the torture of Tursunov. He also refused to put Forum 18 through to other officials, or talk further. No other Interior Ministry official was prepared on 17 May to talk about the impunity torturers enjoy.

"What do you expect..?"

The regime frequently uses extreme and repeated pressure – including torture - against people of all faiths exercising their freedom of religion and belief. Among other recent examples the mother-in-law of a Protestant Christian was ordered by police to physically attack her and evict her from her home, and the use of other forms of torture. Contrary to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, no prosecutions appear to have been brought in these and other cases.

Repeated attempts – for example by Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants – to end the impunity officials enjoy to commit torture and other illegal actions have not resulted in prosecutions or jail sentences for the officials concerned.

"I know of no cases when officials were arrested or put on trial for torture of Christians," one Protestant told Forum 18 on 20 May. "Officials violate the law, the Constitution, international obligations, and even internal regulations of the law-enforcement agencies. But they are 'not guilty' because they are doing their job."

The Protestant added: "What do you expect when the Religious Affairs Committee thinks that even the post cards we send each other on Christian holidays are extremist?"

Shia Muslim released on parole, but still no legal Shia texts

Jahongir Kulijanov, a Shia Muslim from Bukhara [Bukhoro], was among 20 Shias detained in Bukhara in February 2017 and tortured, and fined in August 2017. Kulijanov was jailed for five years in September 2017 for having works on Shia history on his mobile phone. Munojot Parpiyeva, his lawyer, lodged an appeal with Bukhara Regional Court on 29 June 2018.

On 5 February 2019 Kulijanov was freed on parole, relatives who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 2 May. He must give the regime 20 per cent of any salary he earns, report to police weekly, cannot leave his home town without police permission, and must not leave Uzbekistan. His parole will end in 2022 when his Labour Camp sentence ends.

No officials responsible for torturing any of the 20 Shia Muslims in Bukhara in 2017 appears to have been either arrested or put on criminal trial.

Police allow Kulijanov to attend a mosque, but relatives pointed out "unless the authorities decide that it is lawful to read Shia history on the internet, we cannot do this." Uzbekistan imposes severe censorship of all religious materials.

Mukhddin Khakimov, who is responsible for state Religious Affairs Committee work with mosques, told Forum 18 on 17 May that he does not know whether any texts about Shia Islam are legally available in the country. He referred Forum 18 to officials of the Committee's "Expert Analysis" Section who - like the head of the Committee - did not answer their telephones on 17 May.

Supreme Court challenge to student hijab ban

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18

Two women are awaiting Supreme Court hearings in their challenges to the ban on female students wearing hijab in Tashkent's state-run International Islamic Academy and its secondary school. The Academy expelled Luiza Muminjanova in 2018, while Abdukakharova was allowed back after complaining. The state took over the Muslim Board's Academy in 2018.

Forum 18 (29.04.2019) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2472 - Uzbekistan's Supreme Court in the capital Tashkent is preparing to hear the appeals of two Muslim women, Luiza Muminjanova and Nazimakhon Abdukakharova. Muminjanova is appealing against her expulsion from Tashkent's state-run International Islamic Academy for insisting on wearing hijab (Islamic headcover) to classes. Abdukakharova is appealing against the ban on wearing hijab in the Islamic secondary school attached to the Academy.

No date has yet been set for the Supreme Court hearings, Muminjanova told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 29 April.



Female students outside Islamic Academy, Tashkent, 2018 ozodlik.org (citizen journalist)

Between September and December 2018, the Islamic Academy forced at least six other female students to leave for insisting on wearing hijab to classes, Yelena Urlayeva, an independent human rights defender from Tashkent, complained to Forum 18 on 16 April (see below).

"Muminjanova was officially expelled for her extended absence from classes, and others were compelled to write their own requests to the Academy to quit, allegedly for lacking finances and other reasons," Urlayeva told Forum 18.

A Tashkent Muslim who knows the female students who were forced to leave the Academy, on condition of anonymity for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 on 16 April that the "Academy threatened that otherwise it will complain against them to the law-enforcement agencies."

"Muscular men and women", likened by one Tashkent Muslim to Soviet-era civilian militia, prevented female students wearing hijab from entering the Academy (see below).

Before the expulsions, the Academy had warned students several times that while attending the Academy they must abide by the secular dress code for secondary and higher education institutions the Government adopted on 15 August 2018 (see below).

Abdukakharova was allowed to continue wearing hijab while attending the Academy's secondary school after launching her complaints (see below).

From 1 April 2019, both the Academy and its secondary school have allowed female students to wear a headscarf, but still not hijab (see below).

More than a thousand students, mostly from within Uzbekistan, currently study at the Academy.

Religious education under tight state control

Religious education is under tight state control. Only state-recognised religious communities with centralised religious bodies (such as the Muslim Board, Russian Orthodox diocese or Baptist Union) are allowed to run educational establishments. Those who conduct religious education outside these officially-approved organisations are fined or jailed.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev created the state-run International Islamic Academy with a presidential decree of 16 April 2018 by merging Tashkent Islamic University and the Islamic Academy. (He also decreed the creation of a Hadith School in Samarkand.)



Imam Al-Bukhari Islamic Institute, Tashkent [Carpodacus/Wikimedia Commons](#)
[\[CC BY-SA 4.0\]](#)

The University had been founded as a state-run institution by then President Islam Karimov in April 1999. The Academy was founded by the Muslim Board as a non-state institution and approved by Presidential decree in December 2017. The merger had the effect of ending the Muslim Board's control of the Academy after only four months' existence.

The state-backed Muslim Board still operates the Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent, founded in 1971, as well as ten Madrassahs in various cities. Independent Islamic education is banned.

"Young women in Madrassahs and students of the Islamic Institute are allowed to wear hijab," Muminjanova told Forum 18. "However, not many can study in the few existing Madrassahs because of the limited numbers of places and the Islamic Institute accepts only those who graduated from a Madrassah."

[Bloggers and others who have criticised the hijab ban and the state controls over the Muslim Board have faced punishment.](#)

Court challenges to ban on hijab

Two Tashkent-based Muslim women, Luiza Muminjanova and Nazimakhon Abdulkakharova, filed complaints against the bans on hijab imposed in 2018 by the International Islamic Academy and its secondary school. But both Tashkent City's Shaykhantaur District Court (first instance) and Tashkent City Appeal Administrative Court between February and March supported the ban.

The two women appealed to the Supreme Court on 28 March. "The Supreme Court is studying the cases and has two months to hear the appeals," Abduvokhid Yakubov, Abdulkakharova's father, told Forum 18 on 10 April. Yakubov also is the legal representative in the Court for both Abdulkakharova and Muminjanova (who is originally from Urgench).

"Although my daughter was allowed to attend classes in hijab from the end of November 2018," Yakubov added, "when we began complaining about the ban on hijab to the authorities, we still pressed on with the complaint against the ban because other students are not allowed to wear it."

He explained that "they permitted my daughter to wear hijab but others were not allowed to do so. The students were told that it is because my daughter challenged the ban in the courts."

Yakubov told Forum 18 that "not all the students appealed against their expulsions because they are afraid of the authorities."

New secular dress code

A government decision of 15 August 2018, signed by Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov, imposed a secular dress code in all educational institutions. This meant a de facto ban on female students covering their heads by wearing hijab.

Muminjanova complained that soon after she was accepted to the Academy in September 2018, she found out that she could not attend classes in hijab. The Academy cited the government's new secular dress code, she told Forum 18 on 15 April 2019.



Dress code notice outside Islamic Academy, Tashkent, 2018 Ozodlik.org (citizen journalist)

"My daughter also could not at first attend her secondary school because of the same government dress code," Yakubov, Abdukhakhorova's father, similarly complained. He explained that the dress code does "not explicitly mention hijab but the model photo presented in the dress code has a knee-high dark skirt and a white blouse without any head cover, where legs, arms, neck and head are seen."

The Academy put up several signs outside its building in late 2018 illustrating what clothing was and was not acceptable for male and female students, based on the government decision. The signs showed that female students must wear knee-length skirts and the head must be uncovered. The examples of photos of women in long dresses covering their legs and head scarves covering their neck and head were crossed out with red lines, indicating that such dresses were not allowed.

The stands were removed on 16 April 2019, Muslims from Tashkent told Forum 18.

"Muscular men and women" enforce hijab ban

Muminjanova told Forum 18 that in September 2018, the Academy held several meetings and threatened students who insisted on wearing hijab to classes with expulsion from the Academy.

A Tashkent Muslim, who wished to remain unnamed for fear state reprisals, said women and men stood in front of the Academy, stopping female students wearing hijab from entering. "These were muscular men and women who acted like civilian militia during the communist [Soviet] times," the Tashkent Muslim told Forum 18 on 17 April. "They used obscene words and shouted at the young women who wore hijab."

Eviction from dormitory was first punishment

The first punishment for Muminjanova was her own "forceful eviction" from the Academy dormitory, she complained to Forum 18.

Later, the Academy stopped allowing Muminjanova to attend classes, and officials prevented her from entering the Academy building at the entrance. "After many unsuccessful attempts to enter the Academy building, I was informed that it had sent a letter of notification to my parents that I was expelled for many absences."

Other female students besides Muminjanova were forced to leave the Academy. These included Aziza Sayfullayeva, Munisa Mirilyosova, Shakhnovoz Godirova and Shakhlo Almatova, all first year students, and Fotima Isroilova, a third year student.

"Another third year female student in December 2018 took academic leave because of the hijab ban," the Tashkent Muslim told Forum 18.

"I heard rumours that up to ten students may have been expelled because their parents also received warnings," human rights defender Urayeva told Forum 18. "Many other female students, fearing expulsion, took off their hijabs and began wearing long wigs of artificial hair to the Academy to cover their hair and heads," Urayeva added.

First suit fails

Both Abdukakharova and Muminjanova lodged suits to court, challenging the hijab ban. Both suits were heard in Tashkent's Shaykhantaur District Administrative Court.

Abdukakharova's suit against the hijab ban and her expulsion from the Academy was the first to reach court.

Judge Sharof Muminov of Shaykhantaur District Administrative Court on 15 February heard Abdukakharova's suit against the hijab ban enforced by the Academy's secondary school.

Participating in the case were Shaislom Akmalov, Lutfullo Abdulkadirov, Legal representatives of the Islamic Academy; Ulugbek Bozorov, Legal representative of the government's Secondary and Higher Education Ministry; Sobitjon Sharipov, Legal representative of State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA); as well as Ikramjon Mardonov, Legal representative of the Muslim Board.

Sharipov of the SCRA told the Court the Academy's secondary school is subject to secular dress code under the auspices of the Islamic Academy.

At the end of the 15 February hearing, Judge Muminov rejected Abdukakharova's suit, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Judge Khasanov of Tashkent City Court on 13 March rejected Abdukakharova's appeal against Judge Muminov's decision, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Judge Muminov on 26 April refused to discuss the case with Forum 18. Asked why Abdukakharova or other young women are not allowed to wear hijab to classes to a secondary school which teaches Islam, Judge Muminov brushed it off, "I do not need to answer you. Also we are not authorised to give comments on our decisions over the phone."

Second suit fails, rights defender and witness not allowed in Court room

Judge Sardor Rakhmudinov of Tashkent's Shakhantaur District Administrative Court heard Muminjanova's suit on 20 February.

Participating in the case were Shaislom Akmalov, Lutfullo Abdulkadirov, Legal representatives of the Islamic Academy; Ulugbek Bozorov, Legal representative of the government's Secondary and Higher Education Ministry; Sobitjon Sharipov, Legal representative of State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA); as well as Ikramjon Mardonov, Legal representative of the Muslim Board.

Sharipov explained to the Court that the Islamic Academy is an "independent from the Muslim Board secular education Institution based on the Government's 22 June 2018 decision No. 466." He stated to the Court that "based on the 15 August 2018 decision No. 666 of the Government, the dress code of the Academy is the common secular dress code for all secular education institutions."

On the orders of Shavkat Zulunov, Chair of the Shakhantaur Court, Urayeva was not permitted in the Court room as an observer at the 20 February hearing of Muminjanova's suit, the human rights defender told Forum 18. "When I was able to enter the yard of the Court building, the Police officers present there expelled me by force."

Shakhlo Almatova, one of the expelled first-year students, "waited at the Court doors for several hours to be called upon as a witness, to tell it how the Faculty of the Islamic Academy pressured the female students not to wear hijab," Urayeva told Forum 18. "In the end she was not allowed to enter the Court room."

At the end of the 20 February hearing, Judge Rakhmudinov rejected Muminjanova's suit by qualifying the Academy decision to expel her as "correct", according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

The Court's Chancellery official (who did not give his name) refused to put Forum 18 through to Judge Rakhmudinov, who had heard Muminjanova's suit. "He will not talk to you anyway," he told Forum 18 on 26 April, and then put the phone down.

Judge Kholmamat Khasanov of Tashkent City Administrative Court on 25 March rejected Muminjanova's appeal against Judge Rakhmudinov's decision, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Tashkent City Administrative Court's officials (no names given) on 26 April refused to say why Judge Khasanov upheld both decisions given against hijab or put Forum 18 through to any other officials who could speak to Forum 18. The official (who did not give his name), who answered Judge Khasanov's number on 26 April, also refused to comment on the decisions or put Forum 18 through to the Judge.

Academy dress code "totally against Islamic norms"

The Shaykhantaur Court decisions "explicitly say that female students must be dressed according to the model photos of the dress code", Yakubov noted.

"Shukhrat Yovkochev, Rector of the Islamic Academy and its faculty as well as the leadership of the Muslim Board, in grave violation of Islamic canons, support secular dress code for women," Uralyeva complained to Forum 18.

Exiled Uzbek Imam Fazliddin Parpiyev, human rights defender Uralyeva and Yakubov emphasised to Forum 18 that according to Islamic tradition, women must cover their heads, hair, shoulders, breast, which is why Muslim women traditionally wear hijab. "Muslims must live according to the moral principles from the Koran," Uralyeva said. Yakubov complained that "The enforcement of the dress code for the Academy is totally against Islamic norms."

"No one was expelled for wearing hijab"

Asked about the ban on hijab and expelled students, the Academy official, who answered the phone of Rector Shukhrat Yovkochev on 23 April (who did not give his name), referred Forum 18 to Bakhodiy Akhmedov, Yovkochev's Assistant.

"No one was expelled for wearing hijab," Akhmedov insisted to Forum 18 the same day. "But some students were expelled for missing classes." However, he refused to specify which students were expelled. When Forum 18 insisted and said that Muminjanova and others were not allowed into the territory of the Academy for wearing hijab and asked why the Academy did so, he replied: "Because of the Government's 15 August 2018 dress code."

Asked why the dress code photo examples indicate that dresses that cover women's legs and scarves covering the head and neck are not acceptable, Akhmedov said: "It is the Government's decision, and we are a secular state education institution." He refused to answer Forum 18 when asked why the institution is named the "Islamic" Academy.

Told that the case is now with the Supreme Court, and asked whether the Academy would permit hijab and restore students who were expelled if the Supreme Court rules in favour of the plaintiffs, Akhmedov responded: "I don't know. It is up to the appropriate authorities." He then declined to talk further to Forum 18.

Asked about the ban on hijab and his [February insistence to Forum 18 that the state had imposed no ban on the hijab](#), Otabek Bazarov, Chief of the Higher Education Ministry's Ethical Issues Department, on 24 April, claimed to Forum 18 that "I did not know that the students were not allowed to wear hijab under the government decision. However, the Islamic Academy is a secular institution, and I do not see a problem here."

Asked why then the Academy is advertised as the Islamic Academy, and why its name is not changed to a secular name, Bazarov could not answer.

Asked why students of the Islamic Academy cannot wear hijab to classes, and if this is not an ethical problem, Bazarov referred Forum 18 to the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA). He then declined to talk further.

Will hijab ban for Islamic Academy and secondary school be lifted?

Yakubov and Muminjanova told Forum 18 that "as of 1 April the Academy and its secondary school began allowing female students to wear traditional Uzbek scarves or head-wear covering their heads but not the neck."

"We do not know if this is an indication that hijab will be allowed in the Academy or its secondary school," Yakubov said. "We complained in the court against the dress code, and for its annulment for the Academy and its secondary school."

Bloggers jailed for criticising Muftiate

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18

Muslim bloggers Tulkun Astanov and Rustambek Karimov face criminal charges launched by the SSS secret police, which still holds Karimov. The two completed 15-day jail terms on 23 April, but only Astanov was freed the following day. They were jailed the same day Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur accused them of being "hooligans" and disrespectful to Muftiate "spiritual leadership".

Forum 18 (25.04.2019) - http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2471 - Tulkun Astanov and Rustambek Karimov, two Muslim bloggers, face criminal charges brought by the State Security Service (SSS) secret police. The secret police claim the men had "extremist" material in their mobile phones. Astanov was released late at night on 24 April, a day after a 15-day jail term expired. But Karimov is still in SSS secret police custody, relatives told Forum 18.



Dress code notice outside Islamic Academy, Tashkent, 2018 Ozodlik.org (citizen journalist)

A Tashkent court jailed Astanov and Karimov on 8 April for 15 days for criticising Uzbekistan's lack of freedom of religion and belief. They were arrested and jailed the same day they met the state-controlled Spiritual Administration of Muslims, or Muftiate (see below).

At the 8 April meeting Astanov and Karimov had asked Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansur among other things why the hijab (Muslim head covering for women) is banned, why imams have to be appointed by the state and preach sermons prepared for them by the state, and why the Muftiate does not help Muslims when their freedom of religion and belief is violated.

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur accused Astanov and Karimov of being "hooligans", and being disrespectful to the Muftiate's alleged "spiritual leadership". The men were then arrested and jailed, one of the charges being "hooliganism" (see below).

The Polish authorities had deported Karimov back to Uzbekistan earlier in 2019 after refusing him asylum (see below).

All religious communities in Uzbekistan are under tight government control. The regime uses the Muftiate to impose complete control on all public manifestations of Islam, including appointing all permitted leaders, controlling what they preach, and deciding on the numbers and locations of mosques. All public manifestations of Islam outside the Muftiate are banned.

Muslims arrested and jailed the same day they question Deputy Chief Mufti

Tulkun Astanov and Rustambek Karimov, two Muslim bloggers, were on 8 April jailed for 15 days after criticising Uzbekistan's lack of freedom of religion and belief. They were arrested the same day they had a meeting with the state-controlled Spiritual Administration of Muslims, or Muftiate.

At the 8 April meeting at the administrative building of the Muftiate, Astanov and Karimov had asked Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansur why the hijab (Muslim head covering for women) is banned, why imams have to be appointed by the state and preach sermons prepared for them by the state, why licensing of halal food products does not exist, and why the Muftiate does not help Muslims when their freedom of religion and belief is violated.

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur accused Astanov and Karimov of "raising their voices in his office as hooligans", and being disrespectful to the alleged "spiritual leadership" of the state-controlled Muftiate and state-appointed imams. The police arrested both men on the same day after the meeting, and they were then jailed.

After their 15-day jail terms expired, both Astanov and Karimov now face criminal charges being brought by the State Security Service (SSS) secret police. Astanov was released late at night on 24 April, one day after the jail sentences expired.

However, Karimov remains in SSS secret police custody, relatives told Forum 18.

Muslims raided, fined, jailed for raising freedom of religion and belief issues

Karimov had earlier sought asylum in Poland. But the Polish authorities rejected his application and earlier in 2019 had deported Karimov back to Uzbekistan, Radio Free Europe's Uzbek Service noted on 11 April.

This is not the first time Astanov has been jailed for raising freedom of religion and belief issues. In an attempt to stop public discussion of freedom of religion and belief issues, ordinary police and State Security Service (SSS) secret police officers between late August and early September 2018 raided without warrants the homes of at least 10 bloggers. The bloggers, including Astanov, had discussed a range of religious and other themes, including calls for women to be allowed to wear hijabs (headscarves), men to have beards, and children to be allowed to pray in mosques.

While in jail in 2018, Astanov had his beard forcibly shaved off, a relative told Forum 18 on 25 April 2019. He was also verbally warned not to use Facebook to criticise the regime.



Fazliddin Parpiyev Ozodlik.org (RFE/RL)

The raids took place in at least five regions of Uzbekistan. Courts then fined many of the bloggers with jail terms of up to two weeks, Forum 18 notes. The authorities "wanted to showcase the jailings to intimidate all others who want to speak about freedoms", a relative of one of the bloggers told Forum 18.

Following the raids, fines and short-term jailings, Imam Fazliddin Parpiyev protested about this and publicly himself also raised freedom of religion and belief issues. He was fired from his post, and the Muftiate, ordinary police and SSS secret police subjected him to questioning. Officials also intimidated his relatives. He then fled Uzbekistan "for my safety" in December 2018 after appealing to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev "as Muslims .. cannot have full freedom of religion and belief".

Muslims are in 2019 being blacklisted for memorising the Koran for a state-run competition, and imams are rotated to stop them influencing congregations.

Muftiate "spiritual leadership"?

Following their 8 April visit to the Muftiate, Astanov and Karimov published several videos of their meeting on Facebook, seen by Forum 18. But later the same day, Tashkent Police arrested them and published their own Facebook video, also seen by Forum 18, of the meeting with Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur where he accused Astanov and Karimov of "raising their voices in his office as hooligans", and being disrespectful to the alleged "spiritual leadership" of the state-controlled Muftiate and state-appointed imams.

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur on 16 April refused to answer Forum 18's questions on 16 April, twice picking up his phone but then putting it down when Forum 18 introduced itself.

Akmalkhan Shakirov, Head of the Muftiate's International Relations Department, on 16 April refused to answer when asked what is wrong with the questions the two bloggers raised, and why why Mansur accused the two bloggers of "hooliganism". Shakirov claimed that "you need to come to our door and show your identification documents for us to answer you", before refusing to talk more to Forum 18.

Jailed for 15 days

Tashkent's Almazar District Court on the same day as the Muftiate meeting and subsequent arrests imposed 15-day jail terms on both Astanov and Karimov. They were jailed under Administrative Code Article 183 ("Hooliganism") and Article 194, Part 1

("Failure to carry out the lawful demands of a police officer or other persons carrying out duties to guard public order").

Colonel Rustam Sayfulov, Chief of Staff of Tashkent Police, on 16 April refused to explain to Forum 18 why Astanov and Karimov were arrested. "The Court has given them jail terms. You need to ask the Court," he claimed before putting the phone down.

Ilham Tokhirov, Chief of the Chancellery of Almazar District Court also refused to answer Forum 18's question on 16 April, referring Forum 18 to an official who refused to give his name and claimed to be Assistant of the Chair of the Court. "They can appeal against our decision if they decide to do so," the Assistant told Forum 18, but refused to comment on the short-term jailings. "You can send your questions to us only through the Supreme Court", he claimed when Forum 18 asked why the bloggers were jailed for raising freedom of religion and belief issues and criticising the state-controlled Muftiate.

Public protest

Yelena Urlayeva, an independent human rights defender from Tashkent who chairs the Human Rights Alliance, held a public protest with Mukhayyo Astanova (Astanov's wife) in central Tashkent on 11 April, demanding that Astanov and Karimov be freed.

Appeals rejected

On 16 April Judge Iroda Mirzayeva of Tashkent Administrative Court rejected an appeal by the men and upheld the short term jailings. A Court official who refused to give her name on 25 April refused to tell Forum 18 why Judge Mirzayeva upheld the jailings. Other Court officials did not answer calls.

New detention after short-term jailing, criminal charges brought

On 23 April, when their short-term jail sentences expired, state-controlled media stated that Astanov and Karimov were then put into SSS secret police custody. The SSS opened criminal cases under Criminal Code Article 244-1, Part 1 "after Tashkent Police referred the case to them for legal evaluation". The SSS "discovered materials on their mobile phones of banned extremist organisations, which propagate ideas of religious dogmatism", state media claimed.

[Criminal Code Article 244-1 punishes the "production, storage, distribution or display of materials containing a threat to public security and public order", Part 1 punishing "production and storage". In April 2016, Article 244-1's possible punishments were increased to imprisonment of between 5 and 8 years, instead of the previous up to 5 years' jail or a fine of between 300 and 400 times the minimum monthly wage. It is normally used only against Muslims exercising their freedom of religion and belief. Since 2013 the regime had increasingly used this Criminal Code article to prosecute and jail Muslims carrying the Koran and Islamic sermons on mobile phones.](#)

Astanov was released late at night on 24 April, but Karimov is still in SSS secret police custody relatives told Forum 18. Astanov has also been warned that he will face further questioning.

Irina Sayfuddinova, Head of Tashkent Police Press Service, refused to tell Forum 18 on 24 April why Karimov and Astanov were not immediately released at the end of their jail terms, and why they now face criminal charges.

Relatives not told where Karimov and Astanov were jailed

Human rights defender Uralyeva told Forum 18 on 15 April that it is not clear where Astanov and Karimov were held. Tashkent Police refused to tell Astanov's wife where he was held, and Tashkent Central Detention Centre (where short-term jail terms are usually served) told her that he was not there. Uralyeva suspects that "Astanov and Karimov were being held in secret police custody right from the beginning".

Imam forced to flee after freedom appeal

Imam Fazliddin Parpiyev fled Uzbekistan "for my safety" after appealing to President Mirziyoyev "as Muslims .. cannot have full freedom of religion and belief". Muslims are blacklisted for memorising the Koran for a state-run competition, and imams are rotated to stop them influencing congregations.

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (11.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2NtW8FR> - A 33-year-old Tashkent Imam, Fazliddin Parpiyev, had to flee Uzbekistan in December 2018, two months after he appealed to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev over violations of freedom of religion or belief for the country's Muslims. Religious Affairs Committee, State Security Service (SSS) secret police, ordinary police, Prosecutor's Office and Muftiate officials immediately pressured and threatened him and his father after he issued his video appeal.

Imam Parpiyev on 7 September 2018 published a video appeal to President Mirziyoyev "as Muslims still suffer injustice and cannot have full freedom of religion and belief". The same day eight Religious Affairs Committee and SSS secret police officials visited him. The same day Imam Parpiyev repeated his appeal at Friday prayers in his Tashkent mosque, and the same evening he was visited and threatened by Religious Affairs Committee officials.

The following day Imam Parpiyev's father was summoned to Tashkent from eastern Uzbekistan and pressured by Religious Affairs Committee and Muftiate officials. Imam Parpiyev refused to make a video withdrawing his original appeal, but his father was then forced to record a video appeal against his son. The same day, on 8 September, the Chief Mufti fired Imam Parpiyev from his post as Imam of a Tashkent mosque.

On 12 September, Tashkent Prosecutor's Office and police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department officials summoned Imam Parpiyev and banned him from speaking about freedom of religion and belief issues. Imam Parpiyev refused, pointing out: "I only expressed people's dissatisfaction," he pointed out. "Do you not see that people hate it when the authorities forcefully take off their head coverings? That is when they were provoked, not because I spoke."

On 17 September state-run television broadcast a programme attacking Imam Parpiyev, featuring among others Religious Affairs Committee and Muftiate officials. Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18 that the television programme influenced people against him.

On 18 December Tashkent Prosecutor's Office again summoned Imam Parpiyev for another warning and "made threats against me demanding that I must not make further public statements or talk to independent media or human rights defenders about freedom of religion and belief" Imam Parpiyev stated. "I had to leave the country [on 19 December 2018] because I was afraid for my safety", Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18.

Ordinary Muslims and human rights defenders have told Forum 18 that the regime has started adding Muslims who regularly attend mosque and who are thought to be influential to the Preventative Register. "Muslims on black lists, including those who were on these lists in the past, are periodically summoned to police stations and mahalla committees for talks and warnings," one human rights defender told Forum 18.

One source used to identify Muslims for surveillance and warnings has been state-run competitions to find Koran Hafizes, who have memorised the Koran. The SSS secret police then questioned winners, a practice that Imam Parpiyev strongly criticised. Other Imams have also told Forum 18 that some of the competition winners were fined recently, but declined to give details for fear of state reprisals.

One Muslim, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 2 February that "the authorities monitor video cameras in mosques, identify persons who are active and regularly attend mosques, and put their names in those lists."

Human rights defenders, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, have told Forum 18 that the regime has also begun rotating Imams, to break their influence over their mosque communities.

A human rights defender from outside Tashkent told Forum 18 on 30 January that this began around late August 2018. "Regional religious affairs officials and Imams say this was a Religious Affairs Committee decision to stop Imams becoming influential". The Religious Affairs Committee has also decided that Tashkent Imams will also travel to regions to conduct Friday prayers periodically.

Appeal for freedom of religion and belief attacked

Imam Fazliddin Parpiyev was on 11 August 2018 appointed as Imam-hatyp of the Omina Mosque, in the capital Tashkent's Yunusabad District. On 7 September on his Facebook page, Imam Parpiyev made a video appeal to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. "I was asking for help as Muslims still suffer injustice and cannot have full freedom of religion and belief," he told Forum 18 on 30 January 2019.

Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18 that immediately after he made his appeal, Muzaffar Kamolov of the regime's Religious Affairs Committee with seven State Security Service (SSS) secret police officers visited him in the morning. One of the SSS secret police officers gave his name as Farhod (he would not give his last name), but none of his SSS colleagues identified themselves with documents, Parpiyev told Forum 18.

"Why did you write that human rights are violated, the officials asked me," Parpiyev stated. When the Imam told them about violations of freedom of religion and belief, they asked him: "If you wanted to appeal to the President, why did you have to do it through Facebook, why didn't you send your appeal through the [state-controlled] Muftiate?" Imam Parpiyev answered them: "It is my right to complain to the President. Every citizen has this right."

That same day, 7 September, after Friday prayers in the mosque, Imam Parpiyev repeated his appeal verbally to his mosque community. He also asked attendees to also raise freedom of religion and belief with President Mirziyoyev. The same evening Kamolov, Erdon Esanov, Ayubkhon Kamolov, Rakhmatillo Sayfuddinov and other Religious Affairs Committee officials visited the Imam. "They demanded that I deactivate my Facebook account," the Imam told Forum 18. "I did so."

Islam, because it has the largest number of followers, is the community the regime is most interested in controlling. This control is mainly exercised through the state-

controlled Spiritual Administration of Muslims, or Muftiate. In addition, all exercise of freedom of religion and belief by anyone – including in print and online - is under tight state control. The import, production and possession of literature – including the Koran and the Bible – and other material including electronic material is strictly controlled with compulsory prior censorship by the regime's Religious Affairs Committee. Punishments for those who violate these restrictions can be severe, including imprisonment.

Father detained

Regime officials summoned Imam Parpiyev's father Shakhobiddin to Tashkent from his home in Andijan [Andijon] in eastern Uzbekistan. When he arrived at Tashkent Airport on the morning of 8 September, regime officials detained him and ordered Imam Parpiyev to come to the Muftiate offices.

"Repent, ask for forgiveness"

Imam Parpiyev arrived at 10 am and was met by Esonov, Kamolov and lawyer Ikrom Mardonov from the Religious Affairs Committee. The Head of the Muftiate's Fatwa Department, Khomid Ishmatbekov, was also present, Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18. "Kamolov led the meeting and stated that the meeting was arranged to convince me to make a video appeal to President Mirziyoyev that I made a mistake, had repented, and asked for forgiveness."

The lawyer Mardonov claimed to Imam Parpiyev: "You violated the Constitution. You cannot make complaints to the President from a pulpit." However, Imam Parpiyev asked: "How is it possible then to thank the President from a pulpit and pray for him?" He also asked the officials to show him what law prohibits complaints to the President.

Lawyer Mardonov then changed his argument and claimed that "it is not acceptable to complain to the President from a pulpit". Parpiyev responded: "I deemed that the pulpit is a holy and high place from which to address the President, who has a high status."

The officials "argued with me for a long time to make the video appeal but I refused to do so, because I did not do anything illegal", Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18.

Pressure on father to make dictated video appeal

The officials then "pressured my father and recorded a video appeal where he stated that 'my son made a mistake and please forgive him'." Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18 that he saw his father sitting in the office of Deputy Chief Mufti Dilshod Khoshimov. "He held papers in his hands and was memorising the text of a video appeal written for him. He was under such pressure." When the Imam tried to convince him not to make the appeal, his father answered: "I have to make this appeal, I have no choice."

The regime frequently uses extreme and repeated pressure against people of all faiths exercising their freedom of religion and belief. This for example includes ordering the mother-in-law of a Protestant Christian to physically attack her and evict her from her home, and the use of other forms of torture.

Imam fired

The same day, on 8 September, the Chief Mufti dismissed Imam Parpiyev from his post as Imam-hatyp of the Omina Mosque.

This was part of the regime's nationwide crackdown on people arguing for freedom of religion and belief. From late August 2018, the regime arrested at least 10 bloggers

across the country for expressing their opinions on freedom of religion or belief issues, such as the freedom of Muslim women to wear the hijab (headscarf), men to grow beards, and children to be allowed to attend mosques. At least eight were given short-term jail sentences of up to 15 days.

Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansur refused to tell Forum 18 why Imam Parpiyev was fired. "Why are you asking me? Journalists twist my words," he claimed on 7 February 2019. "And so I will not answer your questions."

Imam summoned to Prosecutor's office

Imam Parpiyev told Radio Free Europe what had happened and after their report the regime did not publish his father's appeal. However, on 12 September 2018, Shokir and Sherzod (who refused to give their last names or show identity documents) of Tashkent's Uchteppa District Police visited Imam Parpiyev's home. "They demanded that I go with them to Tashkent Prosecutor's Office." When the Imam asked if he could invite his lawyer, they told him: "It is not necessary, because the Prosecutor just wants to talk to you."

At the Prosecutor's Office, the Imam was met by Tashkent City Prosecutor Sherzod Oblokulov, the Head of Tashkent police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department Lieutenant Colonel Abduvokhid Shukurov, and an official named Ravshan who refused to give his last name or show identity documents.

"We warn you and prohibit you from making such public statements"

Prosecutor Oblokulov asked Imam Parpiyev why he had made public statements on freedom of religion and belief. The Imam told him that Muslims are dissatisfied with the regime, for example with its forcing girls in schools and female students in higher education institutions to take off head coverings. Oblokulov claimed in reply that "your statements provoke people against the authorities".

Officials give contradictory answers when asked about the issues Imam Parpiyev identified. For example, Bakhrom Mamadiyev, Vice Rector of Tashkent's Islamic Institute, told Forum 18 on 7 February 2019 that as a secular education institution the Higher Education Ministry only allows the Institute's students to wear secular dress. Yet that same day Otabek Bazarov, Head of the Higher Education Ministry's Ethical Issues Department, claimed to Forum 18 that there is "no ban on head cover from the Ministry". Asked if women are allowed to wear head coverings if any education institution allows it, Bazarov emphatically replied "Yes".

When Imam Parpiyev pointed out to Prosecutor Oblokulov that "I only expressed people's dissatisfaction. Do you not see that people hate it when the authorities forcefully take off their head coverings? That is when they were provoked, not because I spoke", Prosecutor Oblokulov replied: "We warn you and prohibit you from making such public statements."

The officials then made Imam Parpiyev sign a statement that he had been warned. Shokirov of the police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department also warned him not to speak on social media or give interviews to journalists.

Tashkent Police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department officers on 7 February 2019 refused to answer Forum 18's questions. They repeatedly claimed that Lieutenant Colonel Shokirov was "not available to talk".

Numerous calls to Tashkent City Prosecutor's office on 7 February went unanswered.

State-run media attack Imam

On 17 September 2018 state-run television broadcast a programme attacking Imam Parpiyev. Among the participants was a Religious Affairs Committee "expert" Sobitkhon Sharipov, Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansur, the Head of the Muftiate's Fatwa Department Homidjon Ishmatbekov, the Muftiate's official responsible for work with mosques Rahimberdi Rahmonov, Tashkent imam Odilkhon Yunuskhon, and Saidafzal Saidjalolov from Tashkent's Islamic Institute named after Imam Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari.

(The regime's censorship means that al-Bukhari's collection of hadiths, which Sunni Muslims regard as the most authentic compilation, is no longer available in Uzbekistan).

Television programme participants attacked Imam Parpiyev for his public complaints about the regime's violations of Muslims' freedom of religion and belief. The Head of the Muftiate's Fatwa Department Ishmatbekov claimed that Imam Parpiyev "divided our society into two parts and sowed confusion among the people. He is a liar, and he provoked people". Saidjalolov from Tashkent's Islamic Institute claimed that "instead of appealing to the President and thanking him for his reforms and pardoning of 16,000 prisoners, he [Imam Parpiyev] made a negative video appeal, abused the teachings of our Imam al-Bukhari and our other Imams, and insulted them by speaking in their name. Were this a different country, he [Imam Parpiyev] would have been dealt with more seriously." Tashkent Imam Yunuskhon said that Imam Parpiyev "abused the pulpit, which is a holy place. It cannot be used for preaching inappropriate, negative, divisive, words."

Sharipov of the Religious Affairs Committee claimed: "Freedom of conscience means that every citizen can freely choose to believe or not to believe in religion. Everyone, without regard to their beliefs, is equal before the law and citizens cannot be forced to believe in religion. Freedom of conscience is not expressed in wearing beards or convincing others to wear beards." He did not address the denials of Imam Parpiyev's freedom of religion and belief.

Feruza Olimova, who was described as a psychologist, compared receiving religious information from the internet – such as Imam Parpiyev's appeal - to looking at immoral photographs on the internet. "This kind of religious information can cripple young people's psychology," she claimed.

Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18 that the television programme influenced people against him. "My relatives and friends asked me 'what have you done?'. Even people I don't know criticised me on the street." He said that the television programme's goal "was to influence public opinion against me".

Saidjalolov from Tashkent's Islamic Institute refused to answer Forum 18's questions about the programme on 7 February 2019. "I am not ready to answer this sensitive question, you just called spontaneously. I need to think about it first." He then claimed: "I talked [on the programme] to my own people of Uzbekistan, I am not going to ask your permission for that." When Forum 18 asked again about the programme, Saidjalolov replied: "I am not going to answer your questions. Please talk to higher authorities."

Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansur also refused to answer Forum 18's questions about the programme on 7 February 2019.

Sharipov of the Religious Affairs Committee's telephone went unanswered on 7 February 2019, and other Religious Affairs Committee officials refused to answer Forum 18's questions.

Prosecutor's Office again warns Imam Parpiyev

On 18 December 2018 Tashkent Prosecutor's Office summoned Imam Parpiyev for another warning. Ikrom Narimov, First Deputy Prosecutor of Tashkent, in his office "made threats against me demanding that I must not make further public statements or talk to independent media or human rights defenders about freedom of religion and belief," Imam Parpiyev stated.

Imam leaves country "because I was afraid for my safety"

"I had to leave the country [on 19 December 2018] because I was afraid for my safety", Imam Parpiyev told Forum 18.

Imam Parpiyev is 33 years old and has a wife and two children. He is a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia, and of Tashkent's Islamic Institute named after Imam Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari.

Secret lists of Muslims on Preventative Register

Ordinary Muslims and human rights defenders have told Forum 18 that the regime has started adding Muslims who regularly attend mosque and who are thought to be influential to the Preventative Register. This is used to target "prevention measures" against individuals, including: prophylactic talks; official warnings; "social rehabilitation"; referral for compulsory treatment; and administrative supervision.

One human rights defender told Forum 18 on 6 February 2019 that "Muslims on black lists, including those who were on these lists in the past, are periodically summoned to police stations and mahalla committees for talks and warnings."

One source used to identify Muslims for surveillance and warnings has been state-run competitions to find Koran Hafizes, who have memorised the Koran. The SSS secret police then questioned winners, a practice that Imam Parpiyev strongly criticised. A different imam, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 1 February that "After the regime identified who hafizes are, they put their names on the secret lists."

One imam told Forum 18 that the SSS secret police asked competition winners why they memorised the Koran, who supported them in this, who financed them, etc." Asked why he thinks the regime did this, one imam stated "because they might be influential in future." Imams have also told Forum 18 that some of the competition winners were fined recently, but declined to give details for fear of state reprisals.

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansur refused to answer Forum 18's questions on why the regime questioned hafiz competition winners.

A Muslim from Tashkent, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 2 February that "the authorities monitor video cameras in mosques, identify persons who are active and regularly attend mosques, and put their names in those lists".

Two human rights defenders who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, as well as human rights defender Shukhrat Rustamov, agreed with this assessment. "President Mirziyoyev recently restored these lists. The purpose is keep Muslims under pressure and the population in fear so they do not become so active in mosques," Rustamov told Forum 18 on 1 February.

Surveillance and targeting of anyone attending places of worship of any faith is normal in Uzbekistan.

Rotating Imams to deny influence

Human rights defenders, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, have told Forum 18 that the regime has begun rotating Imams, to break their influence over their mosque communities.

A human rights defender from outside Tashkent notes that this began around late August 2018. "Regional religious affairs officials and Imams say this was a Religious Affairs Committee decision to stop Imams becoming influential," the human rights defender told Forum 18 on 30 January. The Religious Affairs Committee has also decided that Tashkent Imams will also travel to regions to conduct Friday prayers periodically.

Various human rights defenders have noted that this policy has begun to be implemented. For example, Abdurakhmon Tashanov of the Ezgulik (Goodness) human rights organisation told Forum 18 on 1 February that he knew several Imams in Tashkent who have been sent to other mosques.

Fined for giving New Testament away

Police searched a woman's flat in Bukhara to seize a New Testament Shukhrat Safarov had given her. A court fined Safarov and ordered the book destroyed. The government's Religious Affairs Committee claimed that using the New Testament for "missionary purposes" is illegal.

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (30.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2UsgMZh> - In the southern city of Bukhara, a court fined a Christian, Shukhrat Safarov, about two weeks' average wages for giving an Uzbek-language New Testament away as a present. The judge ordered that the New Testament be destroyed. Police had found the New Testament during a search of the recipient's home. The authorities committed multiple illegalities throughout the case.

After a late September 2018 police raid on a group of 40 Protestants meeting in Tashkent Region, where police "psychological pressure" resulted in a woman and a 5-year-old girl being hospitalised, a court has upheld the fines on 27 local Christians and deportations of four South Korean Protestants (see below).

No prosecutions appear to have been brought against the police who carried out torture, despite Uzbekistan's legally-binding obligations under the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (see below).

And after a large November 2018 raid involving the National Guard and other agencies on Baptists meeting for Sunday morning worship in Yashnobod District in the capital Tashkent, police returned some of the Christian literature they confiscated. However, they have not returned children's literature, song books, and music notes. The authorities do not appear to have brought any prosecutions or other actions against the officials who acted illegally (see below).

Bukhara: Fined for New Testament gift

In December 2018 Shukhrat Safarov, a Protestant in the southern city of Bukhara [Bukhoro], gave a local woman an Uzbek-language New Testament. Police subsequently searched her flat in Karakul District and found the New Testament, local Protestants who wish to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 27 January 2019.

Police officer Begzod, who refused to give his last name, told Safarov on 5 January that the search allegedly happened because of "because of complaints against her from residents of her mahalla [residential area]". Police confiscated the New Testament, even though she told officers it was a gift.

Police often search homes for religious literature of all kinds, and mahalla committees are a key part of the regime's attempts to control all of society.

On 27 December 2018 a police officer illegally forced his way into Safarov's flat without being invited, without a search warrant, and refusing to show any identification. The unidentified officer then demanded that Safarov accompany him to Bukhara Police Station. Safarov refused to do so without the legally required officials summons.

Police routinely break the law, and unfair trials are also common.

When Safarov received an official summons he came to the Police Station on 5 January. There, a police officer who claimed his name was Begzod – illegally without giving his last name, or showing his identification – told Safarov he was being charged with breaking Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons"), and Article 240, Part 2 ("Attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity"). Officer Begzod also broke the law by not showing Safarov the police case files.

Against international human rights standards, the regime has made it illegal for anyone to share any beliefs with anyone else.

Officer Begzod did show Safarov an "expert analysis" of the New Testament by Begzod Kadyrov, Chief Specialist of the government's Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent. Kadyrov stated that the New Testament was legally imported, but its use for missionary purposes is illegal. Local Protestants pointed out that this violates the legally-binding international human rights standards that the regime has signed.

Kadyrov refused to answer Forum 18's questions on 28 January. "I have no time to listen to your fables," he claimed, before putting the phone down.

Uzbekistan imposes total censorship of all printed and electronic religious literature, and police often confiscate books which have passed the state's compulsory censorship. The regime has repeatedly tried to stop followers of religious beliefs, including Christians, from reading their own sacred texts in their own homes.

Bukhara Police told Forum 18 on 29 January that Safarov's case is being dealt with by Begzod Toshpulatov of Bukhara Police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department.

Toshpulatov refused to explain why he broke the law during his questioning of Safarov, or why any action is being taken against Safarov. "I do not know you, and I cannot discuss this with you over the phone," he claimed on 29 January. "You need to come to our Police Station so we can talk." When Forum 18 asked why people are punished for

owning Bibles or New Testaments or giving them to others, Toshpulatov repeated his previous claim and refused to talk more.

On 15 January, Judge Ruslan Zairov of Bukhara Administrative Court fined Safarov three times the minimum monthly wage or 552,900 Soms. This is equivalent to about two weeks' average wages for those in formal work. The Judge also ordered the destruction of the confiscated Uzbek-language New Testament.

Courts often order the destruction of confiscated religious literature, and the regime is particularly hostile to non-Muslim religious believers using Uzbek (the state's official language) in religious texts. The use of Uzbek by non-Muslims as the main language of public worship is banned, even though the ban has no legal basis.

A Bukhara Court Chancellery official, who refused to give her name, refused to tell Forum 18 on 28 January why Safarov was fined. Judge Zairov "is busy and cannot come to the phone", she claimed.

Tashkent Region: Impunity for torture continues

After a late September 2018 police raid on a group of 40 Protestants meeting in Tashkent Region, where police "psychological pressure" resulted in a woman and a 5-year-old girl being hospitalised, a court imposed large fines on many of the participants. The prosecution used four women who accompanied police on the raid as witnesses in the case, despite being accused by Protestants of stealing property from some of the Protestants. Neither the thieves nor the officials suspected of torture were prosecuted.

On 19 December, Judge Uchkun Tursunov of Tashkent Region's Administrative Court upheld the fines on 27 local Christians and deportations of four South Korean Protestants. No prosecutions appear to have been brought against the police who carried out torture, despite Uzbekistan's legally-binding obligations under the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Court officials have repeatedly refused up to 25 January 2019 to answer Forum 18's questions as to why there was no investigation of the police's illegal actions, including torture.

Tashkent: Some confiscated literature returned, no prosecutions

On 25 November 2018, 20 plain clothes officials rising later to 40 officials raided Baptists meeting for Sunday morning worship in Yashnobod District in the capital Tashkent. For the first known time in such raids, members of the military – the National Guard – took part in the raid. Other agencies participating in the raid included the State Security Service (SSS) secret police, the Justice Ministry, and Yashnobod District Police. When Baptists asked why the SSS secret police and the National Guard were on the raid, the raiders responded: "It is a special operation".

Officials searched every part of the building, which was "ransacked", Baptists complained. Officials confiscated about 7,800 items of literature and DVDs, including all books and songbooks the Church uses for its meetings for worship. When one woman tried to conceal some songbooks used for worship, an official "screamed at her that you are liars, Christians must not hide anything". Police threatened Baptists they "will come every Sunday and disrupt the Church service every time until we give up and stop our activity".

However, the authorities have not yet carried out those threats. On 27 December police returned some of the Christian literature they had confiscated during the raid. However, Andrei Serin of the Church told Forum 18 on 22 January that the "we still need the children's literature, song books, and music notes to be returned as we need them for conducting worship".

The authorities do not appear to have brought any prosecutions or other actions against the officials who acted illegally.