



Honorary Co-Chair
The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu
The Honorable Václav Havel (*In Memoriam*, 2006-2011)

FREEDOM NOW

January 27, 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Patrick Griffith
+1 202.223.3733
pgriffith@freedom-now.org

**UNITED NATIONS DECLARES CONTINUED DETENTION OF
AKZAM TURGUNOV ARBITRARY; CALLS FOR RELEASE**

Washington, D.C.: In response to a petition filed by Freedom Now, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has issued an opinion that the detention of Akzam Turgunov by the Government of Uzbekistan is arbitrary and a violation of international law. The UN Working Group—an independent panel of human rights experts from around the world calls for his release.

In July 2008, Mr. Turgunov—an experienced Uzbek opposition leader and human rights advocate—was investigating police corruption in the town of Manget and working as a lay public defender on behalf of a woman in a divorce settlement dispute. Police in Manget arrested Mr. Turgunov in response to this work on spurious extortion charges. While holding Mr. Turgunov without access to a lawyer, an interrogator poured boiling water on Mr. Turgunov’s neck and back. The government sentenced Mr. Turgunov to 10 years in prison after a procedurally deficient trial where the court denied him the right to confront his accuser. Now at the age of 60, Mr. Turgunov is detained at a prison camp where he is forced to work in a brick-making factory.

In its opinion, the Working Group recognized that the extortion charges against Mr. Turgunov were a fabricated means to punish him for exercising his fundamental rights to freedom of opinion, expression, association, and political participation. It held that “the Government used an involvement of Mr. Turgunov in the resolution of a settlement in civil matters to prosecute and punish him for his human rights and political activities.” The Working Group found that the “non-observance of the international norms relating to the right to a fair trial... in this case [were] of such gravity as to give the deprivation of liberty an arbitrary character.” The Working Group also noted that authorities failed to adequately investigate the mistreatment of Mr. Turgunov and called on the government to “release Mr. Turgunov and accord him an enforceable right to compensation.”

“We reiterate the Working Group’s demand that Mr. Turgunov be released,” said Maran Turner, Executive Director of Freedom Now. “The international community must now join the United Nations in condemning the Uzbek government’s flagrant disregard of its obligations under international law and raise Mr. Turgunov’s case at every opportunity.”

Freedom Now serves as international *pro bono* legal counsel to Mr. Turgunov.

###

1776 K Street NW, 8th Floor • Washington, D.C. 20006 • +1 202.223.3733 • www.freedom-now.org

Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.