



Aramais Avakyan **Uzbekistan**

Aramais Avakyan is a fisherman and practicing Christian wrongfully sentenced to seven years in prison on fabricated charges related to membership in an Islamic extremist organization.

Prior to his arrest, Avakyan owned a fish farm in Dzhizakh, Uzbekistan. On September 1, 2015, the town's mayor, threatened to have Avakyan imprisoned for his refusal to relinquish the business. Three days later, after Avakyan and four of his business partners did not return home, their relatives reported them missing. It was later revealed that masked officers stopped a car carrying Avakyan and his colleagues and forcibly removed them to a detention center in Tashkent.

The next day, relatives of two of the missing individuals received text messages from unknown mobile numbers, stating that the men had left to carry out a "jihad." These texts were allegedly sent despite the fact that Avakyan is a practicing Christian. In November 2015, authorities finally informed relatives that the men had been detained by authorities the day before the incriminating texts were sent.

Avakyan's family first saw him at a court hearing on January 6, 2016. His hands were bruised; he had visibly suffered significant weight loss, and was barely able to stand. Avakyan had to be brought to court on a stretcher because he had a broken leg.

Avakyan was charged with plotting anti-constitutional activities, sabotage, production or dissemination of threatening materials, participation in a religious extremist organization and theft. Uzbek investigators accused Avakyan of setting up and leading a group that spread radical Islamic ideology in an attempt to overthrow Uzbekistan's constitutional order, and further accused the five individuals of planning to join the ISIS.

The trial had a number of procedural violations and inconsistencies, including testimony by an imam who had died two years prior to the events in question, the prevention of Avakyan's lawyers from participating in the trial, and the introduction of witness statements that were the product of coercion.

On February 19, 2016, Avakyan was convicted of "plotting anti-constitutional activities" and sentenced to seven years in prison before the Dzhizakh Regional Criminal Court. The other defendants who had pled guilty were sentenced to prison terms between five and one half years and twelve years.

Avakyan appealed his conviction on March 4, 2016.

In February 2017, Freedom Now [submitted a petition](#) to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Avakyan. In May 2017, the [Working Group found](#) his detention to be in violation of international law and called for Uzbekistan to immediately release him.

Freedom Now brought international attention to Avakyan's case by issuing a report to the UN Human Rights Council prior to Uzbekistan's [universal periodic review](#) and a report to the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) prior to Uzbekistan's periodic review.

Avakyan was released from prison on February 1, 2020 after serving more than four years of his sentence.