



Azam Farmonov
Uzbekistan

Azamjon Farmonov is a prominent human rights defender who was wrongly detained in Uzbekistan in 2006 on extortion charges. He was initially sentenced to nine years in prison, followed by an additional sentence of five years.

Prior to his arrest, Farmonov served as Chairman of the Syrdarya region branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan where focused his advocacy on defending farmer's rights, monitoring trials, and producing informational pamphlets on human rights issues that he shared with other Uzbek human rights organizations and foreign embassies.

On the morning of April 29, 2006, police arrested Farmonov and charged him with extortion. That day authorities searched Farmonov's apartment on three separate occasions, seizing, among other items, human rights pamphlets. During these raids, investigators struck Farmonov's pregnant wife, knocking her unconscious.

Following his arrest, Farmonov was held *incommunicado* for over a week and held in isolation without access to his family for approximately a month. During this time, authorities tortured him in an attempt to force him to make a confession. Farmonov's trial was plagued with inconsistencies and violations of fair trial standards. The government appointed a lawyer to represent Farmonov; however, his family declined the lawyer's services after learning that he was allegedly present while authorities tortured Farmonov. On June 15, 2006, the Yangiyer City Criminal Court sentenced Farmonov to nine years in prison. Following his conviction, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch declared Farmonov to be a prisoner of conscience.

As the end of Farmonov's sentence approached he was accused of a series of minor prison infractions, such as retorting to other prisoners and failing to wear a distinguishing badge. For such alleged insults he was placed in solitary confinement on several occasions for up to twenty days. The prison authorities tortured Farmonov in order to obtain his confession to such alleged infractions by suffocating him with a rubber mask until he passed out and forcing him to listen to the screams of others being tortured as a threat of similar treatment.

On April 25, 2015, Farmonov was charged with "disobeying the legal demands of the administration of a correctional facility." He was sentenced to an additional five years in prison after a one day trial in which he did not have access to an attorney and was not permitted to introduce exonerating evidence.

As of October 25, 2016, Farmonov was subjected to two further disciplinary remands for infractions of prison regulations. His health worsened in prison; his body was covered in pustules the size of walnuts and he experienced pain in his kidney from time to time.

Freedom Now represented Farmonov as his international *pro bono* counsel. In November 2012, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued [**Opinion 65/2012**](#), finding Farmonov's detention to be in violation of international law and calling for his immediate release.

A second petition was filed with the [**UN Human Rights Committee**](#) in September 2014. The Committee [**issued a decision**](#) in April 2018 finding that Farmonov's detention was a violation of international law and ordering Uzbekistan to pay compensation.

Freedom Now brought international attention to Farmonov's case by issuing [**a letter to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, press releases**](#), a report to the [**UN Committee Against Torture**](#), a report to the UN Human Rights Committee prior to Uzbekistan's periodic review in [**2015**](#) and [**2020**](#), a [**letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders**](#), and a report to the UN Human Rights Council prior to Uzbekistan's [**universal periodic review**](#).

In May 2011, four members of the German Bundestag [**sent a letter**](#) to Chancellor Angela Merkel raising the issue of Farmonov and other Uzbek political prisoners.

Farmonov was released from prison on October 3, 2017 after receiving a presidential pardon.