

XIX

ARTICLE 19

For immediate release – 10 October 2008

Uzbekistan: ARTICLE 19 Condemns Sentencing of Uzbek Journalist to Ten Years' Imprisonment

LONDON – ARTICLE 19 strongly condemns the imprisonment of Uzbek journalist and human rights defender, Salijon Abdurakhmanov.

Abdurakhmanov is one of the few remaining independent journalists writing on controversial issues of social and economic justice, human rights and corruption in Karakalpakstan, an autonomous republic of Uzbekistan. He has worked for UzNews.net, an independent online news agency, and freelanced for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

Abdurakhmanov was arrested on 7 June 2008 after illegal drugs were found in the boot of his car. The journalist claimed that drugs were secretly placed there and he was charged with illegal drug possession.

A medical examination subsequently proved that Abdurakhmanov does not use drugs, but the state refused to release him. Instead, he was charged for selling illegal drugs. Today, the Tahtakupir Regional Court of Karakalpakstan found him guilty of this offense and sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment. The journalist will appeal the conviction to the Supreme Court of Karakalpakstan.

“In many countries, journalists are prosecuted for doing their jobs but in countries like Uzbekistan state authorities fabricate accusations against journalists for ordinary crimes. In both cases, the aim is to silence independent and critical voices,” stated Dr Agnès Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19. *“We are very concerned about the appalling situation for freedom of expression in Uzbekistan.”*

Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Uzbek authorities should guarantee the rights to fair trial and protect freedom of expression. ARTICLE 19 urges the Supreme Court of Karakalpakstan to ensure that the appeal process for Salijon Abdurakhmanov is fair, including the thorough examination of evidence provided by all parties. ARTICLE 19 considers the charges against Abdurakhmanov to be politically motivated and calls for his release or acquittal.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Oliver Charles oliver@Article19.org +44 20 7278 9292
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name

from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.