



September 2016

KYRGYZSTAN: Free a human rights defender

A few years ago, Azimjan Askarov was living with his wife and their two sons in a Kyrgyzstan (Keer giz stan) village. (To find where Kyrgyzstan is, see the map on page 2.)

The family made homemade jams and pickled foods grown in their garden. They liked baking cakes together. They were looking forward to the wedding of one son. Azimjan was working as the director of an organization that monitors and defends human rights.

But everything changed in June 2010.

The government did not like how Azimjan and his organization were reporting harmful actions by police officers, filming police at demonstrations, and taking photos of homes being set on fire. They arrested him. They invented fake crimes to charge him with, like helping to kill a police officer and “storage of ammunition”. The government put him on trial but it was not conducted fairly. They

told him he must stay in prison for the rest of his life.

Azimjan is in an underground cell at Prison 47 in Bishkek, the capital city. He can receive visitors, parcels, food and newspapers. He can leave his cell to exercise in a small courtyard. And, because he graduated from art school, he enjoys painting and drawing in prison.

But Azimjan is not well. Prison guards once beat him with plastic bottles filled with liquid. He now suffers from headaches. At 65, his health is getting worse.

Amnesty International says that Azimjan Askarov is a prisoner of conscience who must be freed because he was only doing his job without breaking any laws or harming anyone.

Note: A prisoner of conscience is someone who is in jail for having views that their government cannot tolerate.



Young artists in Kyrgyzstan sent Azimjan Askarov their drawings to cheer him up. On the right you can glimpse some of his own sketches.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Please write to the president.

- Start your letter Dear President Atambaev.
- In your first sentence, tell him where you live or how old you are.
- Then explain that you heard about Azimjan Askarov from Amnesty International. You could mention that Amnesty International says he is a prisoner of conscience.
- **The most important point is to ask the president to set Azimjan Askarov free.**
- If you want to add one more request, ask the president to make sure Azimjan Askarov is safe up to the minute of his release.



WHERE DO I SEND MY MESSAGE?

President Almazbek Atambaev
Prospekt Chuj, 205
Government House
Bishkek 720003
Kyrgyzstan

Postage: \$2.50
Fax: 011 996 312 625 012
Email: psp@adm.gov.kg or
oip@adm.gov.kg



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Azimjan is an artist. He likes drawing and enjoys painting portraits and landscapes. Send a drawing or painting you have made to decorate his cell. Or mail him a postcard from your community, a greeting card or a photo of yourself. Make sure to add your name, town and country. If you would like to add something in Kyrgyz, try writing

Мы думаем о Вас! which means We're thinking of you, or

Желаем Вам сил в борьбе за справедливость which means Wishing you strength in your fight for justice.

Use a \$2.50 stamp and mail your greeting to

Azimjan Askarov
Koloniya No. 47
Bishkek
Kyrgyzstan

If you have not received this Lifesaver directly from Amnesty International's Toronto office and would like future actions, reach us at the contact information in the header. There is no cost.