

UA 118/21

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## **TURKMENISTAN OPPOSITION ACTIVIST AT RISK OF TORTURE**

Azat Isakov, a Turkmen activist with the opposition movement Turkmenia, Unite! went missing in Russia on 20 October and reportedly reappeared later in Turkmenistan. According to a statement by Turkmenia, Unite! he is held incommunicado in the Ministry of National Security department in Turkmenabat, in north-east Turkmenistan. His fate and whereabouts must be officially confirmed. Azat Isakov is at imminent risk of torture and other ill-treatment, he must be released immediately.

Azat Isakov, a Turkmen labour migrant living in Russia, has been a vocal critic of the Turkmenistan government since 2019 and joined the opposition movements Turkmenia, Unite! On 20 October Isakov sent a message to a trusted contact explaining that he feared Russian policemen were about to arrest him. Since then, all messages have stopped.

On 9 November a member of Turkmenia, Unite! received a formal response to their inquiry from the Russian Ministry of Interior indicating that Azat Isakov left the country on 22 October. Azat Isakov could not have left the country through his own means because he did not possess the necessary travel documents.

Since 2020 Azat Isakov and his family members living in Turkmenistan have reported receiving constant threats from officers of the Ministry of National Security of Turkmenistan, including threats of abduction and rape of family members

### **Write to the President urging him to:**

- Ensure the urgent disclosure of information on the fate and whereabouts of Azat Isakov;
- If he is in the custody of Turkmenistani law enforcement, ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment and that he has access to his family and any medical care he might require
- Release Azat Isakov immediately unless there is sufficient credible evidence to charge him with an internationally recognized criminal offence

### **Write to:**

President of Turkmenistan  
Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov  
The Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the United Nations  
866 UN Plaza, Suite 540

New York, NY 10017

USA

Fax: 1-212-486 25 21

Email: [turkmenistan@un.int](mailto:turkmenistan@un.int)

Email: [go.saparov@gmail.com](mailto:go.saparov@gmail.com)

Salutation: Dear President,

### **And copy**

His Excellency Meret ORAZOV

Ambassador

Embassy of the Republic of Turkmenistan

2207 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20008

USA

Tel: 1-202-588-1500

Fax: 1-202-588-0697

Email: [turkmen@mindspring.com](mailto:turkmen@mindspring.com)

### **Additional information**

Turkmenia, Unite! movement is an opposition group that actively criticizes the Turkmenistan government through social media. They post videos on their Facebook and YouTube pages where they highlight social problems within the country and call on the president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to respond to people's needs.

Turkmenia, Unite! became very vocal after the events in 2020: mass poisoning of Turkmenistani labour migrants in Turkey in March, and hurricane that brought havoc in the Lebat region in April.

Azat Isakov's parents, wife and children live in Turkmenistan. Since Azat Isakov's online activism they have reported threats from the Ministry of National Security. On 24 July 2020 Ministry officials seized their phones to investigate Isakov's whereabouts in Russia. Two days later one of the pro-government YouTube channels declared that they knew Azat Isakov's Russian address. Soon afterwards Azat Isakov started to receive threats and demands to return to Turkmenistan. Isakov was afraid of persecution and after his documents were stolen he refused to go to the Russian migration services to renew his working status. On 15 September Russian police apprehended Isakov but released him after 2 days in custody. On 20 Oct Azat Isakov disappeared and was reported back in Turkmenistan on 22 Oct. Activists from Turkmenia, Unite! posted a statement on their YouTube channel where they claim Isakov is being held incommunicado in the 6th branch of the Police Department in Turkmenabat notorious for prosecuting opposition figures and journalist, and using torture practices.