

# Human Rights Watch

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

**<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/09/turkmenistan-un-blames-government-activists-death>**

## Campaign and Advocacy

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Carry out Ruling in Muradova Case

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(Washington, DC) - The United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) has found the Turkmen government responsible for the torture and death of a human rights activist, the [Prove They are Alive Campaign!](#) said today. The activist, Ogulsapar Muradova, died in state custody in 2006, after her arrest and trial on politically motivated charges. Human Rights Watch is a member of the campaign.

Ogulsapar Muradova in the mid-1990s

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Ogulsapar Muradova in the mid-1990s Annadurdy Khajiev

Finally, theres an authoritative acknowledgment of the Turkmen governments responsibility for the monstrous torture and death of Ogulsapar Muradova, said [Rachel Denber](#), deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, of the Prove they Are Alive! campaign. Now the government should identify all those responsible for her death, hold them to account to her family. Its been 12 years, but its never too late for justice.

The government should also immediately end the forced disappearances of dozens of other people being held in Turkmen prisons, the campaign said.

Muradova was an activist with the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, an independent human rights group that works on Turkmenistan from exile in Bulgaria, and a regular contributor to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In June 2006, police in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, arrested Muradova and two other activists, her brother, SapardurdyKhajiev, and Annakurban Amanklychev, and also her three adult children.

Just before the activists arrest, two of them had been assisting with a documentary about human rights and related issues in Turkmenistan.

Muradovas children were released a few weeks later. In August 2006, following a rushed, closed trial, a court convicted Muradova, Amanklychev, and Khajiev on bogus charges related to alleged possession of bullets, and sentenced Muradova to six years in prison, and Amanklychev and Khajiev to seven years.

The [circumstances of the activists arrest](#) left no doubt they were targeted in retaliation for their human rights work, the campaign said. For example, then-President Saparmurat Niyazov, in a televised speech, condemned Muradova for assisting foreign journalists in gathering slanderous information to show discontent among the population, and other statements in the state media called her and the other activists traitors.

Muradova was held incommunicado the entire time she was in custody. On September 13, 2006, just weeks after her closed trial, [her family was informed that she had died](#). Morgue staff allowed her family to see her body only after diplomatic intervention. A family member who viewed the body said he saw a deep cut in on her forehead, a dark mark around her neck which could be consistent with strangulation, open wounds on her hands, and severe bruising on her legs.

According to [unconfirmed information received in December 2006](#) from a law enforcement official, Muradova died from torture during an interrogation by National Security Ministry officers. Another source later said a suicide was staged to conceal the real circumstances of her death.

The government claimed Muradova died of natural causes and did not investigate her death. In its response to the HRC in December 2016, the government said Muradova had been kept in Ovadan-Depe (prison AH-T/2) and claimed that on September 13, 2006, she committed suicide by hanging herself.

The HRC, responding to a complaint filed by Muradovas brother, Annadurdy Khajiev, found the Turkmen government responsible for violating Muradovas right to life, [in an opinion issued in April 2018](#). The committee made the decision public in August.

The committee found that Turkmen authorities arrested Muradova for her journalism and human rights work, and that they did not conduct a prompt investigation into allegations of torture and her death in custody. It also found that the governments failure to provide any information about her death caused mental stress to Khajiev that amounted to inhuman treatment.

The committee said the Turkmen government should conduct an impartial investigation into the circumstances of Muradovas death; provide the family with a full account of its investigations, including the autopsy report, copies of trial transcripts, and the court verdict; and provide a remedy to Muradovas family, including compensation and rehabilitation of her name.

Muradova was included in the Prove They Are Alive! campaigns [List of the Disappeared in Turkmenistans Prisons](#). The campaign said that like Muradova, dozens and most likely hundreds of other people have been subjected to lengthy periods of incommunicado detention, following rushed, closed, and unfair trials. Their families have been deprived of any information about their loved ones, in many cases for as long as 16 years. A list compiled by the Prove They Are Alive! campaign includes 112 confirmed cases of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan. Dozens of their family members live in a constant state of distress tantamount to torture, not knowing their loved ones whereabouts, or whether they are dead or alive.

The Turkmen government should promptly reply to the HRC and take immediate steps to remedy the violations of Muradovas and her familys rights, the Prove They Are Alive! campaign and Human Rights Watch said. It should immediately end the practice of incommunicado detention and make a concerted effort to provide information to family members and relevant international bodies about the fate and whereabouts of people in custody.

Ending enforced disappearances is an important step toward ensuring that no one suffers the same fate as Olgusapar Muradova, said Vitali Ponomarev, Central Asia program director at the Memorial Human Rights Center, a partner in the campaign. Its time for the Turkmen government to end the suffering of the disappeared and their many families who are denied information about their loved ones.

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