

# Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/06/uzbekistan-free-political-prisoners-end-torture>

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UN Body Condemns Imprisonment and Alleged Torture of Rights Defenders

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(Berlin) The Uzbek government should release all prisoners held on politically motivated charges and commit to ending torture on December 8, 2013, to mark the 21st anniversary of the constitution. Such steps would demonstrate a genuine commitment to [Uzbekistan's](#) much-touted reform process.

Journalists, rights defenders, writers, opposition figures, and religious believers are languishing behind bars because of their peaceful activities, and many of them have suffered torture or ill-treatment, said [Steve Swerdlow](#), Central Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. Freeing political prisoners for Constitution Day is President Islam Karimov's chance to show he's serious about reform.

For Constitution Day Uzbek authorities regularly announce an amnesty, potentially for thousands of prisoners. Such amnesties generally apply to those convicted of less serious offenses and for specific demographic categories such as teenagers, women, and prisoners over age 60. But those imprisoned on politically motivated charges are almost never released. Political prisoners who would otherwise be eligible for amnesty are denied year after year for alleged infractions of internal prison regulations. Such infractions have included saying prayers and wearing a white shirt. Even if they are released, the terms of the amnesties leave the original convictions intact.

Last month, the United Nations Committee Against Torture, a body of 10 independent experts that monitors governments' implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, expressed [concern](#) at the numerous, ongoing, and consistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan. The committee also noted that the European Court of Human Rights found in 2011 that torture and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan are systematic, unpunished, and encouraged by law enforcement and security officers.

Among its other recommendations, the committee called on Uzbekistan as a matter of urgency to carry out prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment and prosecute and punish all those responsible and ensure that high-level officials in the executive branch publicly and unambiguously condemn torture in all its forms, directing this especially to police and prison staff.

The committee further expressed concern that human rights defenders that have been deprived of their liberty have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. One such case is [Azam Formonov](#), a well-known rights activist, who has been imprisoned at Uzbekistan's Jaslyk prison colony since 2006. Formonov's lawyer and relatives told Human Rights Watch that he was tortured frequently both during pretrial custody in 2006 and then in the first years of serving his criminal sentence, including being stripped of his overclothing, handcuffed, and left in an unheated punishment cell for 23 days in January 2008, when temperatures reached approximately -20 degrees Celsius. In 2011 he was bound and beaten for refusing to write a document denying that he had ever been tortured. Additionally, he was repeatedly transferred back and forth to Nukus prison when prison authorities learned that representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were about to visit Jaslyk.

The damning UN report underscores the urgent need for serious pressure on the Uzbek government to improve its abysmal rights record, said Swerdlow. International partners should push the Uzbek government to make the changes identified by the UN. Constitution Day is a good place for the Uzbek government to start.

Human rights defenders in prison for no reason other than their legitimate human rights work include: Solijon Abdurakhmanov, Azam Formonov, Mehriniso Hamdamova, Zulhumor Hamdamova, Isroiljon Holdarov, Nosim Isakov, Gaibullo Jalilov, Turaboi Juraboev, Abdurasul Khudoinazarov, Ganihon Mamatkhanov, Chuyan Mamatkulov, Zafarjon Rahimov, Yuldash Rasulov, Bobomurod Razzakov, Dilmurod Saidov, Nematjon Siddikov, and Akzam Turgunov. The journalist Jamshid Karimov was reported to have been released in 2011 from a psychiatric ward where he was forcibly confined, but he was reported missing several months following his release, prompting fears that he has been detained again and is being held incommunicado.

Other prominent writers, intellectuals, and opposition figures in jail on politically motivated charges include: Muhammad Bekjanov, Batyrbek Eshkuziev, Ruhiddin Fehriddinov, Hayrullo Hamidov, Bahrom Ibragimov, Murod Juraev, Davron Kabilov, Matluba Karimova, Samandar Kukanov, Gayrat Mehliboev, Erkin Musaev, Yusuf Ruzimuradov, Kudratbek Rasulov, Rustam Usmanov, Ravshanbek Vafoev, and Akram Yuldashev.

Twenty-four of those imprisoned on politically motivated charges are in serious ill health and at least the same number have suffered torture or ill-treatment in prison.

Uzbek authorities should order an immediate investigation of all allegations of mistreatment of prisoners held on politically motivated charges, allow for re-examination of the closed hearings in which political prisoners sentences have been extended, and grant all prisoners access to necessary medical care and family visits to which they are entitled under international human rights law, Human Rights Watch said.

In addition to the above-listed activists, the Uzbek government has imprisoned thousands of independent Muslims and other religious believers who practice their faith outside strict state controls or who belong to unregistered religious organizations on overly broad and vague charges of so-called religious extremism, attempts to overthrow the constitutional order, and possession of illegal religious literature.

In 2013 Uzbek authorities imprisoned at least three more activists: Bobomurod Razzakov, a representative of the human rights organization *Ezgulik* (Compassion) in Bukhara; Nematjon Siddikov, a member of the Human Rights Alliance in the Fergana Valley; and Turaboi Juraboev, a Jizzakh-based rights defender and a frequent contributor to Radio Ozodlik, the Uzbek service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Another activist, Kudratbek Rasulov, a member of the political opposition movement, the Peoples Movement of Uzbekistan, was detained in October 2013 on unspecified charges and remains in detention. None are involved in violence.

For 11 years the Uzbek government has denied access to all 11 UN experts who have requested invitations, including the UN special rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders and on torture, and has failed to comply with recommendations by various expert bodies. In April 2013, the governments lack of cooperation led the ICRC to end its prison visitation program.

Uzbek authorities also deny registration to local independent human rights groups and have forced many international organizations and media outlets to leave Uzbekistan, including Human Rights Watch, which was forced to close its Tashkent office in March 2011. In its concluding observations, the Committee Against Torture called on the Uzbek government to amend its legislation and policies to facilitate the reopening, granting of access to, and full functioning of independent national and international human rights and humanitarian organizations.

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