

Human Rights Watch

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

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In the wake of recent violence in Uzbekistan, Uzbek authorities have arbitrarily detained and harassed dozens of independent Muslim women, Human Rights Watch said today. Many are being held incommunicado, which puts them at serious risk of torture. The arrests indicate a broadening of the governments crackdown on nonviolent independent Muslims, who practice their faith outside state religious institutions.

Human Rights Watch documented the arbitrary detention over the past two weeks of 40 independent Muslims, including 13 women, many of whom are relatives of men currently imprisoned for their nonviolent religious beliefs or practices. Five of those detained during the recent police sweeps are minors. Reports from local rights groups around the country indicate that new arrests of independent Muslims, including women, may number in the hundreds. Police have also harassed and intimidated dozens of other independent Muslim women.

The Uzbek government is using the recent bombings in Tashkent as a pretext to justify a crackdown on independent Muslim women, said Rachel Denber, acting executive director of Human Rights Watchs Europe and Central Asia division.

In late March and early April, a series of violent attacks including explosions reportedly set off by several female suicide bombers in Tashkent claimed the lives of an estimated 47 people. The government has not charged the women recently detained with involvement in the suicide bombings or other violence. In most cases, no charges at all have been filed against the detainees.

In one case, detailed below, police beat and threatened to rape a woman in custody. The whereabouts of some female detainees remain unknown.

We are concerned that the Uzbek government is taking this opportunity to broaden its campaign against religious dissidents who have no apparent connection to the attacks, said Denber.

Human Rights Watch investigated several cases that suggest security forces had been given free rein to use particularly brutal methods against women:

Khamida Karbaeva

Plainclothes law enforcement officers arrested Khamida Karbaeva at her home in Tashkent at 4 p.m. on April 3. The officers said they were looking for Karbaevas husband but, unable to locate him, took her into custody instead. They took Karbaeva to an unknown location, presumably the headquarters of the National Security Service (SNB), interrogated her for several hours about her religious beliefs, insulted her for wearing a headscarf and questioned her about her husband.

When Karbaeva refused to reveal her husbands whereabouts, an officer punched her in the stomach and on her arms and back. A Human Rights Watch representative saw the bruises on Karbaevas body nine days later. The officer also ripped off Karbaevas headscarf and long coat, which she wears in accordance with her religious beliefs. He also threatened to strip off her dress, to photograph her naked and to show the photographs to people in her neighborhood in order to ruin her reputation and show them what kind of woman you are. He pointed to a mattress in the corner of the room and threatened to rape Karbaeva unless she answered all of his questions.

The officers held Karbaeva for more than 24 hours. During that time, they gave Karbaeva, who is breastfeeding her 9-month old baby, only a single cracker and nothing to drink until she fainted. She was not permitted to go home to nurse her baby, nor was she allowed to have her baby brought to her, despite her repeated requests.

Karbaeva was released on April 4. Without informing her, SNB officers had detained her 10-year old son at 9 p.m. on April 3, while Karbaeva was still in custody. The officers held him separately overnight without the presence of an adult relative or guardian. Security

agents interrogated the boy about his mothers husband (his stepfather) and one of the husbands friends, whom officers accused of indoctrinating the boy into Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) and training the boy to be a fighter for a militant Islamic organization. The officers forced the boy to identify photographs and took him in a car to show them the location of his training before releasing him to his mothers custody.

Mirakhim Khaidarov, Lydia and Nilufar Khaidarova

In another case, police in Tashkent detained Lydia and Mirakhim Khaidarov and their 26-year-old daughter Nilufar, who remains in police custody at an unknown location. At 5:30 a.m. on April 5, armed uniformed police entered the Khaidarov familys house. Two of the Khaidarovs sons as well as Nilufars husband are currently in prison on religion-related charges. The Khaidarovs were taken from their house at gunpoint without being allowed to dress or use the bathroom, while approximately 20 officers searched the house and courtyard. Officers claimed to find a book, religious leaflets and a box of videotapes.

The Khaidarovs were taken to the Sabir Rakhimov district police station, where they were each interrogated separately. Lydia Khaidarova asked an officer why they were taken at gunpoint and was told, Just be grateful we didnt plant bombs in your pockets. Police then transferred the three to the Tashkent City Department of Internal Affairs. Her parents, Lydia and Mirakhim Khaidarov, were released on the night of April 6, but Nilufar remains in custody. The City Department of Internal Affairs has refused to provide any information regarding her whereabouts.

Mahfuza Nosirova and Diloram Mukhamedova

Mahfuza Nosirova and Diloram Mukhamedova, who are relatives, were arrested on March 29 by police in the Fergana Valley city of Andijan. Nosirova is the 16-year-old daughter of the late Farhod Usmanov, who was detained on allegations of possession of unsanctioned religious literature and was apparently tortured to death by police in 1999. At the time of her arrest, Nosirova was in Andijan with Mukhamedova (age 31) on a visit to Andijan prison to see a relative convicted on charges related to his religious affiliation and practice. Mukhamedovas husband, father, and other male relatives are all currently in prison on religion-related charges.

Police said that Nosirova and Mukhamedova were detained because they did not have identity documents in their possession when they were stopped by officersthey reportedly lost these documents at a police checkpoint. However, even after neighborhood police chiefs in Tashkent sent notices on April 4 confirming their identities, Andijan authorities refused to release the two. Their mothers have traveled twice to Andijan with a lawyer, but authorities there refused to give the lawyer access to the woman and the girl, or even to provide information regarding their wellbeing or the grounds for their detention. Police reportedly told the detainees mothers that they had to keep the woman and girl in custody because they could be terrorists or suicide bombers.

Mahbuba Usmanova and Sahiba Khodaiberdieva

Mahfuza Nosirovas sister, Mahbuba Usmanova, and stepsister, Sahiba Khodaiberdieva, were also detained for several hours by Tashkent police, who accused them of being dangerous people who might blow themselves up. Officers accused them of being terrorists and threatened, We will destroy your whole family. The young women were eventually released with a warning from police: We are watching your every step. Numerous members of the Usmanov family have been jailed and harassed during the course of the government campaign against independent Muslims. Human Rights Watch detailed their story in a [report](#) released on March 30, Creating Enemies of the State: Religious Persecution in Uzbekistan.

Jamila Azimova

Jamila Azimova, who was released from custody and given a three-year suspended sentence on religion-related charges by a Tashkent court on March 14, was rearrested and taken back into custody on April 7. Police took her to the district police station and then to the City Department of Internal Affairs. She was denied access to her attorney. Her family also has not been allowed to see her and was told that a court has already changed Azimovas sentence to 6-years incarceration and that she will be sent directly to prison.

Former detainees at a Tashkent police station told Human Rights Watch that the corridors there are full of women in hijab. They said they heard screams of women held in detention, suggesting possible mistreatment.

Police Conduct

Police conduct during the latest rounds of arrests has been rife with violations of legal procedure. Large numbers of armed officers have raided homes without warrants, conducted unsanctioned searches and confiscated legitimate religious materials such as copies of the Koran and books and pamphlets printed by state publishing houses. Human Rights Watch has also received allegations that officers have stolen money and other valuables during the course of these searches. In the case of Khamida Karbaeva, for instance, officers failed to produce a warrant for the search of her home. In the case of the Khaidarov family, police reportedly seriously damaged the familys property while ransacking the house.

Police appear to have been given carte blanche, and the situation is rife with abuse, said Denber. Meanwhile, the international community has remained largely silent in the face of these horrific violations. This must stop. Uzbekistans allies must speak out to prevent further abuse.

Human Rights Watch has also found widespread mistreatment of men arrested in the recent police sweeps. Eyewitnesses said that during the past two weeks police have physically abused independent Muslim men in detention to coerce confessions. Officers beat men, hit them on the ears and genitals, burned them with lit paper and cigarettes, stuck metal pins under their fingernails, and anally raped male detainees with bottles and other objects. One man was stripped naked and beaten until pulpy.

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