

= Azimzhan Askarov =

Azimzhan Askarov (Uzbek : Azimjon Asqarov , ??????? ?????? ; born 1951) is an ethnically Uzbek Kyrgyzstani political activist who founded the group Vozduh in 2002 to investigate police brutality . During the 2010 South Kyrgyzstan ethnic clashes , which primarily targeted people of the Uzbek nationality , Askarov worked to document the violence .

He was subsequently arrested and prosecuted on charges of creating mass disturbances , incitement of ethnic hatred , and complicity in murder . Following a trial protested by several international human rights groups for irregularities ? including alleged torture and the courtroom intimidation of witnesses by police ? Askarov was given a life sentence , which he is currently serving . In November 2010 , Askarov 's health was reported to be rapidly deteriorating as a result of his confinement . Numerous groups have advocated on his behalf , including Human Rights Watch , Reporters Without Borders , People In Need , the Committee to Protect Journalists , and Amnesty International , the latter of which designated him a prisoner of conscience .

In 2015 , the U.S. conferred the 2014 Human Rights Defender Award on Askarov . The Kyrgyz government protested this decision and formally terminated a 1993 agreement on cooperation between the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan . On 12 July 2016 , the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan revoked the life sentence against Askarov and sent his case to the Chui Oblast Court for review .

= = Personal life = =

Azimzhan Askarov was born in 1951 in the village Bazar @-@ Korgon , Kyrgyzstan . He attended an arts college in Tashkent . After getting his degree Askarov worked as a painter and decorator for 15 years . In the early 1990s , he began writing about human rights issues in a local newspaper . He is married to Hadicha Askarova and they have three children .

= = Human rights work = =

Askarov has worked as a human rights activist since the mid @-@ 1990s . In 2002 , he founded the group Vozduh (Air) to monitor the conditions of Kyrgyz prisons . Working primarily in the area of Bazar @-@ Korgon , Askarov directed this group until the time of his arrest and was able to initiate new investigations of several cases of police brutality and torture . Several police officers were dismissed from their posts as a result of Askarov 's investigations . Askarov has stated that in 2006 , a prosecutor 's investigator sued Askarov following an article he wrote publicizing torture allegations ; the six @-@ month court case ended with a verdict in Askarov 's favor . As a result , Askarov claims , " Enemies in the law enforcement community were constantly looking for an opportunity to shut me down . "

= = Arrest and trial = =

In July 2010 , Kyrgyzstan saw an outbreak of ethnic violence in which as many as 2 @,@ 000 people , primarily Uzbeks , were killed , and hundreds of thousands displaced . Following the violence , dozens of Uzbek community and religious leaders were arrested by the Kyrgyzstani government and accused of inciting ethnic violence , among them Azimzhan Askarov , who had been filming killings and arson attacks during the riots . Askarov then distributed the video to international media and accused the Kyrgyz military of complicity in the killings .

He was arrested on 15 June 2010 in Bazar @-@ Korgon . Kyrgyzstan 's human rights ombudsman , Tursunbek Akun , protested the arrest shortly after .

Askarov was tried along with other human rights activists before a court in the Nooken District of the Jalal @-@ Abad Province . An observer from Human Rights Watch stated that both the defendants and the witnesses evidenced fresh bruises and appeared to have been tortured . The observer also stated that members of the trial 's audience openly threatened and assaulted Askarov , other defendants , and their lawyers inside the courtroom , and that local law enforcement refused to

intervene . Askarov 's lawyer , Nurbek Toktagunov , stated that he was also approached by the relatives of a police officer and threatened with violence if he continued to defend Askarov , leading Amnesty International to issue an appeal for the safety of both Toktagunov and Askarov .

Askarov testified himself that he had been beaten and tortured while in police custody , and his lawyer reported that Askarov had further bruises on his back . On 4 November 2010 , however , the prosecutor 's office held a press conference to deny any beatings had taken place .

= = Imprisonment and health = =

On 10 November 2010 , Askarov 's sentence was upheld by an appellate court . Two days later , Amnesty International reported that Askarov 's health was failing rapidly ; he was soon moved from his prison hospital to a hospital in Bishkek . Members of his family expressed concern that he was receiving inadequate care from prison authorities .

On 8 February 2011 , the Kyrgyzstani Supreme Court agreed to hear new evidence in Askarov 's case ; however , his hearing was suspended . On 11 April 2011 , his appeal hearing was postponed for the second time . On 20 December 2011 , the Kyrgyzstani Supreme Court upheld Askarov 's sentence .

Askarov 's lawyer then said he would protest the Supreme Court 's decision in the UN Human Rights Council , however Askarov himself was against this , feared of not being able to survive until the day of decision . Askarov insists on the review of his case in the Kyrgyz legislature .

= = International attention = =

Amnesty International , Human Rights Watch , the Committee to Protect Journalists , Front Line , International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) , and the International Federation for Human Rights have all denounced the charges against Askarov . The Committee to Protect Journalists called for him and fellow detainee Ulugbek Abdusalomov to be released , and for the officers who arrested them to be investigated for " abuse of office " . His cause has also been championed by American actor Martin Sheen . The US Embassy in Bishkek also put pressure on the Kyrgyz government to hold " impartial hearings " on Askarov 's appeal . Reporters Without Borders has called for his immediate release .

On 8 March 2011 , People In Need awarded him the Homo Homini Award " in recognition of a dedication to the promotion of human rights , democracy and non @-@ violent solutions to political conflicts . " In an acceptance speech written from prison , Askarov responded , " I cried like a baby . There are no words to express my heartfelt joy . After much suffering , torture and humiliation , I realized once again the high social value of fighting for human rights and justice ! " .

In May 2011 , an exhibition of Askarov 's paintings opened in Bishkek , organized by his wife and various Kyrgyz human rights organizations . The paintings focus on " the inhabitants of the Fergana valley and scenes from their everyday lives . " .

In 2012 , Askarov won the International Press Freedom Award of the Committee to Protect Journalists . The award recognizes journalists who show courage in defending press freedom despite facing attacks , threats , or imprisonment .