



To: Mr. Oleg L. Slizhevsky, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Belarus

Cc: Mr. Alexander Vladimirovich Koniuk, General Prosecutor of the Republic of Belarus

7 August 2015

Regarding the case of Ms. Shabnam Khudoydodova

We, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, are writing to express our concerns with regard to the possible extradition to Tajikistan of Tajik citizen Ms. Shabnam Khayrulloevna Khudoydodova. We are of the conviction that Ms. Khudoydodova is at severe risk of being subjected to torture if returned to Tajikistan, and as such, in line with Belarus' international obligations, cannot be extradited to Tajikistan. We are therefore calling on you to ensure that Belarus upholds its international obligations and secures Ms. Khudoydodova from forced return to Tajikistan.

The Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Belarus is a signatory, oblige Belarus to secure the principle of non-refoulement. Furthermore, Belarus is bound by the United Nations Convention against Torture, according to which, a person cannot be expelled to "another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture". The widespread use of torture in Tajikistan is well documented through thorough research conducted by our partners in the NGO Coalition against Torture Tajikistan. The nature of the charges against Ms. Khudoydodova furthermore gives us substantial grounds for believing that she is at severe risk of torture if returned to Tajikistan.

Amnesty International has documented that persons detained on charges relating to national security issues and extremism are at particular risk of torture in Tajikistan. Having charged her under Article 307 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, namely "Public Calls for Forcible Changing the Constitutional System of the Republic of Tajikistan", it is clear that the Tajik authorities view Ms. Khudoydodova as relevant to national security issues. She is furthermore associated with the outlawed and extremist-ruled opposition group "Group 24", and we are of the conviction that the Tajik authorities consider her a member of said group. Thus her case must be considered to be related to both national security issues and extremism – it is therefore beyond any reasonable doubt

that an extradition of Ms. Khudoydodova to Tajikistan would put her in particular risk of torture, and would constitute a grave violation of Belarus' international commitments.

Ms. Khudoydodova was detained in Belarus on 13 June after fleeing from Russia, where she had learned about her planned abduction at the hands of the Tajik authorities. Ms. Khudoydodova's involvement in politics had been limited to the lawful expression of her discontent with the current Tajik regime on social media, beginning early this year. Targeting peaceful activists merely for exercising their constitutional right to free speech is symptomatic for the current Tajik regime, and one of many manifestations of the repressive rule and ongoing clampdown on fundamental freedoms under President Rakhmon. We hereby urge you to take the necessary steps in order to ensure the principle of non-refoulement and secure Ms. Khudoydodova from extradition or other forced return to Tajikistan.

We thank you for your attention to the case addressed in this letter and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely



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