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International Partnership for Human Rights, Brussels, <http://www.iphronline.org>; the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, The Hague, <http://www.nhc.nl>; the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Oslo, <http://www.nhc.no>

**Appeal to EU institutions and Member States:  
Take Action in Support of Endangered Turkmen Human Rights Defender**

*Brussels, The Hague, Oslo 14 October 2010.* The International Partnership for Human Rights, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee are seriously concerned about recent threats directed at Farid Tukhbatullin, a well-known Turkmen human rights defender who lives in exile in Austria. We call on the EU institutions and member states to raise these threats with the Turkmen government. We also call on the Austrian authorities to provide physical protection to Tukhbatullin and his family.

Tukhbatullin, who fled Turkmenistan with his family in 2003 and subsequently was granted asylum in Austria, actively reports on human rights problems in Turkmenistan to the international community. Through his Vienna-based NGO, the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), he publishes independent reports, comments and analyses from and about the country.

In the last few days, Tukhbatullin has received warnings from credible sources that Turkmen security services are planning an attack on his life in revenge for his criticism of the Turkmen government. According to these sources, the plan is to “eliminate” him in a way that would not give rise to suspicion about foul play, e.g. by making it look like a car accident or a sudden heart attack. In another possibly related incident, the [website](#) of TIHR was attacked by unknown hackers last week, as a result of which much of its content was disabled for several days.

Tukhbatullin believes that the threats and harassment against him may have been prompted by an [interview](#) with him aired by the satellite TV channel K+, which broadcasts in Russian in the Central Asian countries, on 29 September 2010. In this interview, he spoke about his human rights activities and expressed critical views regarding the current state of human rights in Turkmenistan. The following day, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov made a [speech](#) to the country’s security services, where he among others called on them to act as “uncompromising warriors against those who defame our democratic law-based secular state and try to destroy the unity and solidarity of our society”.

Turkmen authorities have already previously tried to put pressure on Tukhbatullin because of his human rights work in exile. Turkmen diplomats have warned him to “tone down” criticism of the Turkmen government on TIHR’s website, and individuals suspected of contributing information to TIHR from inside Turkmenistan have been summoned for interrogation by security services. In June this year, security officials visited several schools in Tukbatullin’s old home town in Turkmenistan and made inquiries about his two sons, who help him in his efforts to publicize information about human rights developments in Turkmenistan. This indicates possible intimidation of a wider circle of acquaintances in the community where the Tukhbatullins used to live. (Read more about this incident [here](#)).

With particular reference to the [EU guidelines](#) on human rights defenders, whose objective is to influence third countries to respect the rights of human rights defenders, we appeal to the EU member states and institutions to convey concerns about the threats against Tukhbatullin to the Turkmen authorities and to request that they refrain from any kind of retaliation against him or others who are involved in peaceful and legitimate activities to promote human rights in Turkmenistan. We also appeal to the Austrian authorities to take prompt and effective measures to investigate the threats against Tukhbatullin and to protect the safety and well-being of him and his family members, including by providing for their physical protection.