

January 26, 2012

H.E. Almazbek Atambaev
President
Kyrgyz Republic
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Mr. President:

We are writing to express our concern regarding the continued incarceration of Azimjon Askarov. Independent observers unanimously agree that Mr. Askarov's trial and appeals were marred by serious procedural violations of the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic. During the trial his lawyers were subject to physical attack and threats in the courtroom in the presence of the judge and police, which made it impossible for them to effectively question witnesses. While in pre-trial detention, Mr. Askarov, an elderly man, was himself the victim of torture.

A renowned U.S. medical expert recently examined Mr. Askarov and concluded that he has suffered severe and lasting physical injuries as a result of his arrest and incarceration. He needs immediate medical help for persistent visual loss, traumatic brain injury, and spinal injury. In addition, he requires immediate evaluation for chest pain and shortness of breath, symptoms which are strongly suggestive of coronary artery disease and could be life threatening without immediate treatment. Despite his ill health, Mr. Askarov has announced his intention to embark on a hunger strike in protest at his unjust treatment.

During his many years of work as a human rights defender, Mr. Askarov made a significant contribution to efforts to improve the rule of law in the Kyrgyz Republic and to protect the rights of many individual citizens of the Republic. He is the recipient of numerous international awards for his human rights work. We understand from your public statements that reform of law enforcement and the judiciary will be high priorities for your Administration. Mr. Askarov's continued incarceration following an unfair trial is a black mark against both the police and judicial systems, as witnessed by critical statements made by foreign governments and organizations following the Supreme Court's rejection of his final appeal, including by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay.

Based on the significant flaws in the handling of his case, his contributions to the Kyrgyz Republic, and his ill health we strongly believe that he should be released from prison so that he may seek the medical treatment he urgently requires. We urge you to grant Azimjon Askarov an immediate pardon on humanitarian grounds, or to ensure his release from prison in any other way acceptable under the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Sincerely,



Albanian Helsinki Committee



Article 19



Belarusian Helsinki Committee



Belarusian Human Rights House



Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

CATENA

CATENA, (Turkmenistan)



CBM EU Liaison Office



Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

CRUDE ACCOUNTABILITY

Crude Accountability



Centre for the Development of Democracy and
Human Rights (Russia)



EUCAM



Eurasian Transition Group

The Foreign Policy Centre

The Foreign Policy Centre



The Foreign Policy Initiative



Free Press Unlimited

Freedom Files

Freedom Files (Russia)



Freedom House



Frontline Defenders



Georgian Young Lawyers' Association



Golos Svobody (Kyrgyzstan)



Helsinki Citizen's Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia



Helsinki Committee of Armenia



Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)



Human Rights Centre (Azerbaijan)



Human Rights House Foundation (Norway)



Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)



Human Rights Watch



Hungarian Helsinki Committee



Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)



International Crisis Group



International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)



International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims



International Republican Institute



Jefferson Institute



Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law



Legal Policy Research Centre (Kazakhstan)



Moscow Helsinki Group



Netherlands Helsinki Committee



Norwegian Helsinki Committee



Nota Bene (Tajikistan)



The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders



Open Society Foundations

Partner Group Precedent

Partner Group Precedent (Kyrgyzstan)



People in Need (Czech Republic)



Physicians for Human Rights



Promo LEX Association (Moldova)



Protection International



Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union



UNITED for Intercultural Action



World Movement for Democracy



Youth Human Rights Movement