

Uzbek human rights defender released from prison

Brussels 7 January 2013. International Partnership for Human Rights welcomes the release of Uzbek human rights defender Gul'naza Juldashaeva, who was imprisoned on trumped-up charges the past summer. Our partner the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders, which Juldashaeva represents, has learned that she was released on 4 January under an amnesty act passed on the occasion of the 20 years anniversary of Uzbekistan's constitution in December 2012.

"We are happy and relieved that Gul'naza Juldashaeva's prison ordeal now is over and that she can reunite with her family," said Brigitte Dufour, Director of International Partnership for Human Rights. "She should never have been in prison in the first place."

Juldashaeva was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of extortion following an unfair trial in July 2012. The charges against her were brought in **apparent retaliation** for her efforts to expose the involvement of local officials in human trafficking cases, including the cases of her two younger brothers. Since October she has been held in the Zangiota women's prison colony in the Tashkent region.

The Uzbek **amnesty act** of 5 December 2012 provides for the release of certain groups of prisoners, including women who have been convicted of crimes that are not considered to be among the most serious ones. The terms of the amnesty do not provide for the overturn of convictions.

On the eve of the 20 years anniversary of Uzbekistan's constitution, IPHR joined eight other human rights groups in **calling on the Uzbek authorities** to use this event as an occasion to release all political prisoners in the country. More than a dozen human rights defenders currently remain in prison. Several of them are known to suffer from serious health problems and many have been subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

"The Uzbek authorities should also release all other human rights defenders who have been imprisoned on politically motivated grounds," stated Brigitte Dufour. "This will show that the protection of fundamental rights laid down by the country's constitution really matters."