

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2004		34	Turkmenistan	Rakhim Esenov, author of historical novel, a.o.

### *Announcement*

Amnesty International and International PEN report that writer Rakhim Esenov (78 years) and two others were detained in connection with Esenov's historical novel, *The Crowned Wanderer*, set during the period of the Mogul Empire (1526-1803 CE). They are believed to be at risk of being tortured. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

P.S.: For previous news on Turkmenistan, see NCH #23, #27, #32. In March 2001 Turkmen state libraries were instructed to confiscate the works of about twenty authors, some of whom had "inaccurately depicted" the country's history.

### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGENT ACTION 90/04**

[This is also the text of International PEN Rapid Action Network 06/04 of 5 March 2004]

Writer and journalist Rakhim Esenov, his friend and fellow-journalist Ashirkuli Bayriryev, and Rakhim Esenov's son-in-law Igor Kapriylov have been detained by Security Service officers and are believed to be at risk of being tortured or ill treated. Rakhim Esenov has reportedly suffered a stroke since he was detained.

Rakhim Esenov was summoned to the Ministry of National Security (MNB) on 23 February. He was reportedly accused of "smuggling" 800 copies of his novel *Iventsenosny Skitalets* (*The Crowned Wanderer*) into Turkmenistan. The book has been banned for 10 years from the publishing houses in Turkmenistan and Rakhim Esenov was only able to get it published in Moscow, in 2003. The books were delivered to his apartment in the capital, Ashgabat, in January, but customs officers removed them after a few days, alleging that they had been imported illegally.

The novel is set during the period of the Mogul Empire, which was founded in the 16th century. It

features the character of Bayram Khan, whom the book portrays as a Turkmen poet, philosopher and army general who saved the Empire from falling apart. In February 1997, President Saparmurad Niyazov had publicly criticised the book and denounced the author for making “historical errors”, but Esenov refused to make the “corrections” the President demanded.

During questioning, Rakhim Esenov was reportedly asked for the names of his smuggling “partners”, and who had financed the novel. Following the interrogation, Rakhim Esenov suffered a stroke and was taken to hospital. He has already been in poor health before his detention, having recently suffered a heart attack.

Two days after his stroke he was again interrogated and placed in an intensive care unit in hospital, where he was under the strict control of the Security Service. The following day at approximately 1pm, Security Service officers took him away from the hospital and the investigator told his daughter that he had been arrested and put into the MND’s investigation-isolation prison.

On 2 March, it emerged that Rakhim Esenov was charged with “inciting social, national and religious hatred” using mass media (Article 177 parts 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan).

On 23 or 24 February, Rakhim Esenov’s son-in-law Igor Kaprielov was taken to the MNB and accused of conspiring with Rakhim Esenov in the smuggle of the books. His whereabouts are now unknown.

The journalist Ashirkuli Bayriyev was summoned to the MNB in the evening of 1 March. As Ashirkuli Bayriyev is a close friend of Rakhim Esenov, it is possible that the MNB summoned him because of his relationship with the writer. Some three-and-a-half hours later, an MNB officer called Ashirkuli Bayriyev’s wife to inform her that her husband had been arrested. It is not known what Ashirkuli Bayriyev has been accused of.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan has been appalling for years. It has deteriorated even further since an alleged attempt to assassinate President Niyazov, on 25 November 2002, which triggered a new wave of repression across Turkmenistan.

The regime is extremely intolerant of dissent, and it has severely limited civil and political liberties. No independent political parties or human rights groups can operate openly in the country, while opponents of the government and civil society activists have been forced into exile or faced imprisonment and

persecution. Freedom of religion and of movement have been severely restricted and ethnic minorities have been targets of harassment and discrimination. The authorities in this virtually closed country have retained tight control of the media.

Key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuses of human rights is President Niyazov's domination of all aspects of life in the country, and the personality cult which he has fostered.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Please send appeals as quickly as possible, in English, Russian, Turkmen or your own language:

expressing concern at reports that Rakhim Esenov suffered a stroke following a Secret Service interrogation on 23 February, and that interrogations continued on 25 February despite his poor health;

urging the authorities to ensure that Rakhim Esenov, Ashirkuli Bayriyev and Igor Kapriyelov are not subjected to any form of violence and are treated humanely;

urging the authorities to inform you of Igor Kapriyelov's whereabouts.

**APPEALS TO:**

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