

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

NOVEMBER 2010

Pastor Ilmurad Nurliev Turkmenistan



Pastor Nurliev photo: Assist News

In Turkmenistan, 45-year-old pastor Nurliev leads the Light to the World Pentecostal Church in Mary. The church has been repeatedly denied registration since 2007, the same year that pastor Nurliev was placed on the country's exit blacklist without officials explaining the reason. Pastor Nurliev was arrested on August 27 this year and held in an overcrowded, smoky cell in the two months before his trial. On October 21 he was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of swindling. Turkmenistan is one of the six independent Turkic states in Central Asia. It is bordered by Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Forum 18 News Service report that the pastor's wife and church members insist the charges have been fabricated to punish him for his religious activity.

'The court also ruled that Ilmurad is a drug addict and ordered forced treatment for this in prison,' stated his wife, Maya. 'This is unjust and a slander,' she added. In reality, Pastor Nurliev is being treated for diabetes, and his wife has been denied the opportunity to see him or give him his medication since his arrest in August. Seydi labor camp, where Pastor Nurliev will be imprisoned, has been used to house several Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses previously. There have been indications that some of these prisoners were tortured in the camp using mind-altering drugs.

Maya said her husband – whom she had not seen since his arrest two months earlier – looked 'very, very pale and thin.' She spoke of having been prevented from coming close to her husband at the trial as he was surrounded by Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police officers. 'They didn't even allow him to kiss me,' she complained. She said she recognized one of the officers, who had raided their home a year or two ago.

Other friends of Pastor Nurliev present at the trial have

stated, 'It was clear the whole thing was set up.' One family friend who was not present but who has known Pastor Nurliev for many years said he was shocked at the verdict. 'He is not a drug addict or a swindler.' Nurliev's wife and church members deny the accusations, and strongly question the credibility of prosecution witnesses. Fifteen church members who came to the Church's Sunday worship service on August 29 - two days after the arrest - signed an appeal to the Prosecutor's Office testifying to the pastor's innocence.

Police applied heavy pressure - including threats that her husband would be fired from his job - against another church member to falsely testify against Nurliev, but she refused to do this.

Forum 18 reported that Pastor Nurliev was convicted on charges of swindling a large amount of money from citizens under Article 228, Part 2 of the Criminal Code, which carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and confiscation of property. Money and a certificate as a preacher which he earned in 2006, seized during his arrest, have still not been returned. His wife has reported to Forum 18 that the court has said that if her husband pays the 561 US dollars prosecutors allege he swindled from people who came to his church, he might be eligible for a prisoner amnesty. 'But he's not guilty,' she insisted.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

'I am in chains for Christ' Philippians 1:13

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PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That Pastor Nurliev will be granted an appeal
- ▶ That he will be kept safe while in prison and that he will be released
- ▶ For wisdom and boldness for Christians in Turkmenistan

PLEASE WRITE

When writing please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

You may send a card of encouragement to
Ilmurad Nurliev
Seydi Labour Camp
TURKMENISTAN
74622 Lebap vilayet
Seydi
uchr. LB-K/12

You may also write on behalf of Pastor Nurliev to;

The Ambassador
Embassy of Turkmenistan
2nd Floor, St George's House
14-17 Wells Street
London W1T 3PD

Your Excellency,

I would like to express my concern about the recent sentencing and detention of Christian pastor, Ilmurad Nurliev. Many in the international community believe the judgement handed down is unwarranted and unjust. They are deeply concerned that the real reason he has been sentenced and imprisoned is that he is being punished simply on account of his Christian faith

Together with Christians from across the world, we are calling for his sentence to be overturned and for him to be released. I appeal to the Turkmen authorities to grant pastor Nurliev full access to a lawyer. I also urge the Turkmen authorities to ensure his wellbeing while in detention.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours respectfully,

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