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UZBEKISTAN: Further 10 years in prison for Muslim prisoner of conscience

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

In the third conviction since December 2020, Navoi City Court handed a further 10-year term to Muslim prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abduvokhidov. The 30-year-old now appears due for release in November 2034. Originally jailed for meeting with others in Tashkent to discuss Islam, Abduvokhidov's latest "crime" was allegedly telling fellow prisoners that the prison authorities "are not Muslims but infidels". The Investigator learned this through "spies in the prison", as well as "recordings of conversations". Another jailed Muslim, Alimardon Sultonov, was put in isolation cell in his new prison.

Prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abduvokhidov was serving an 11-year jail term handed down in 2020. His "crime" was meeting with others in his home city of Tashkent to discuss Islam. In December 2023, a Tashkent Region court handed down a further 10-year term. His new "crime" was to be three minutes late for a prison roll call. On 17 March 2025, after seven hearings, Navoi City Court handed down a further 10-year prison term. It appears the 30-year-old is now due for release in November 2034.

Abduvokhidov's latest "crime" was allegedly telling fellow prisoners that the prison authorities "are not Muslims but infidels". Investigator Orif Buronov told relatives that he learned this through "spies in the prison", as well as "recordings of conversations" (see below).

"I tried to convince the Court that Abduvokhidov could not be charged for leadership or participation in a criminal religious organisation and that there was no proof of this," his state-appointed lawyer Khondamir Kulbayev told Forum 18. "But the Court rejected all my arguments." He declined to discuss further details of the case because of a gagging order. Forum 18 could not reach the Judge or anyone else at the Court (see below).

"Fariduddin told me that his new prison term combined with his last term will be ten years in prison, which will be counted from November 2024, when the new criminal case was opened," Abduvokhidov's mother told Forum 18 on 9 April after visiting her son in prison (see below).

Abduvokhidov's relatives said he had not appealed against the new sentence as previous appeals failed and they do not have enough money (see below).

The prison authorities transferred Abduvokhidov on 10 April to the special-regime Prison No. 17 (popularly known as Qorovulbozor prison) in Bukhara Region, some 550 kms from his home in Tashkent. The duty officer there, who gave his name as Captain Nurlayev, refused to put Forum 18 through to the Prison governor or any other officials (see below).

In December 2024, Karshi Criminal Court jailed eight Muslim men – four of them former prisoners of conscience – for between six and 10 years for meeting together to discuss Islam. Police threatened the men's families that if they appealed the jail terms would be increased. The eight men did appeal to Kashkadarya Regional Court. On 16 April 2025, the Court announced that it will issue the appeal verdict on 30 April (see below).

Since Muslim prisoner of conscience Alimardon Sultonov was transferred to a harsher prison in January, the administration of his new prison - Navoi Prison No. 4 - put him in the isolation cell for 15 days in February. He "told the prison authorities that he will do any other jobs except [cleaning the toilets] because he was specifically told that they intended to insult him and his faith and make him a show case for others through this job," his mother told Forum 18 (see below).

Ravshan Shernazarov, Governor of Navoi Prison No. 4, introduced himself but put the phone down when Forum 18 asked about Sultonov (see below).

Abduvokhidov: Regime puts prisoner of conscience on trial again

In November 2024, Navoi Regional Police Criminal Investigation Department opened the latest criminal case against prisoner of

conscience Fariduddin Bakhodir oghi Abduvokhidov (born 14 June 1994). A Muslim prisoner of conscience, he was already serving two prison terms under fabricated charges for extremism and terrorism.

Police Investigator in the case Orif Buronov alleged to Abduvokhidov's mother in mid-January 2025 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960) that Abduvokhidov had told fellow prisoners that the prison authorities "are not Muslims but infidels". Investigator Buronov stated that he learned this through "spies in the prison", as well as "recordings of conversations". (Prisoner of conscience Faryozbek Kobilov faced pressure in January 2025 to act as such a spy, but refused to do so (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960).)

The regime (which has never faced a free and fair election) carries out intensive surveillance of the people it rules, including installing surveillance cameras inside and outside places of worship (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2736).

Investigator Buronov suggested to Abduvokhidov's parents that they may never see their son again if he receives a third long prison sentence, a human rights defender stated.

Investigator Buronov refused on 12 February to answer Forum 18's questions (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960) about the case, and then put the phone down.

Prosecutors handed the case against Abduvokhidov to Navoi City Court. Judge Bahodir Alikulov began hearing the case on 6 February. Judge Alikulov told Forum 18 on 21 February that the trial was continuing. He refused to give other details or the case.

Judge Alikulov refused to say why Abduvokhidov, who was earlier convicted on alleged extremism and terrorism charges, is being prosecuted for the same "crimes" now in prison. "I cannot share the details of the trial with you based on our Procedural Code," he insisted (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960).

Abduvokhidov's father and mother told Forum 18 on 21 February (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960) that they were not aware that their son was already on trial again. "The authorities did not even warn us about the hearings," they complained. Not knowing the dates of future hearings makes it difficult for them to travel from Tashkent where they live to Navoi where the trial is. "It is more than 500 kms away and we don't have the means to travel there and stay in a hotel indefinitely."

Asked why Abduvokhidov's parents were not notified of the dates of the trial hearings, Judge Alikulov replied (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960): "We have the Court system website, where they can find the information, if they want to participate. Let his parents contact us."

Abduvokhidov: Muslim prisoner of conscience given new long prison term

On 17 March, after seven hearings in the trial that had begun on 6 February, Judge Bakhodir Alikulov of Navoi City Court handed Fariduddin Abduvokhidov a 10-year prison term. Khondamir Kulbayev, his state-appointed lawyer, told Forum 18 on 9 April that the trial ended on 17 March and the Court issued the verdict on that date.

Abduvokhidov was convicted under Criminal Code Article 244-1, Part 2 ("Distribution of materials that contain ideas of religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism, calls for pogroms or violent expulsion of citizens, or aimed at creating a panic among the population, as well as distribution or demonstration of attributes or symbols of religious-extremist terrorist organisations") as well as Article 244-2, Part 1 ("Creation, leadership or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist or other banned organisations").

"I tried to convince the Court that Abduvokhidov could not be charged for leadership or participation in a criminal religious organisation and that there was no proof of this," lawyer Kulbayev told Forum 18. "But the Court rejected all my arguments."

Kulbayev, however, declined to tell Forum 18 what his exact arguments against the charges were and other details of the case. "I am bound by the law not to reveal specific details of the case." He further declined to discuss the case.

"Fariduddin told me that his new prison term combined with his last term will be ten years in prison, which will be counted from November 2024, when the new criminal case was opened," Abduvokhidov's mother told Forum 18 on 9 April after visiting her son in prison.

Called numerous times, telephones for Navoi City Court and Judge Alikulov went unanswered between 14 and 22 April.

Abduvokhidov's family said he had not appealed against the new sentence as previous appeals failed and they do not have enough money.

Abduvokhidov transferred to special-regime prison in Bukhara Region

On 8 April, Fariduddin Abduvokhidov's mother visited him in Navoi Police Investigation Prison. This was her first visit since he was transferred there in November 2024, when prosecutors opened the new criminal case against him. "We talked through a thick glass window over the phone," Abduvokhidov's mother told Forum 18 on 9 April 2025.

The prison authorities transferred Abduvokhidov on 10 April to a special-regime Prison No. 17 (popularly known as Qorovulbozor prison) in Bukhara Region, his mother told Forum 18 on 14 April. Abduvokhidov called his mother on 11 April from Qorovulbozor prison to tell her about the transfer and said she should be able to visit him in May.

The duty officer who answered the phone at Qorovulbozor prison on 15 April gave his name as Captain Nurlayev (he refused to give his first name). He refused to put Forum 18 through to the Prison governor or any other officials.

Captain Nurlayev confirmed that Abduvokhidov was transferred to their prison but refused to tell Forum 18 whether he can enjoy his religious freedom, including reading the Koran and praying the namaz. "You can contact the Chief Directorate of Execution of Punishments under the Interior Ministry on those questions," he said and put the phone down.

Telephones at the Interior Ministry's Chief Directorate of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent went unanswered on 18 and 22 April.

Abduvokhidov's prison address:

Uzbekistan

200900 Bukhara viloyati

Qorovulbozor tumoni

Istiklol kuchasi 1

17 sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Abduvokhidov: Visits not possible due to lack of finances, letters not passed on

Fariduddin Abduvokhidov's mother lamented to Forum 18 that "Neither his father nor I could visit him while he was in Navoi Prison because it is more than 500 kms from Tashkent where we live and we don't have the means to travel there and stay in a hotel."

She complained to Forum 18 that Navoi Prison officials did not pass their letters to Abduvokhidov. "We received a letter from him once from Navoi Prison through the lawyer, in which he asked why we did not visit him and why we did not write to him." She explained that it is "true that we could not visit him but we wrote letters to him. So we understood that they did not pass our letters to him."

The travelling distance between Tashkent, where Abduvokhidov's parents live, and Qorovulbozor, where his new prison is, is some 550 kms.

Abduvokhidov: Prisoner of conscience's previous two jail sentences

In November 2020, Tashkent City Criminal Court jailed prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abduvokhidov along with six other prisoners of conscience for between 11 and four years. Their "crime" was to meet in Tashkent to discuss Islam. The court jailed Abduvokhidov for 11 years. The court gave nine other men restricted freedom sentences.

On 5 December 2023, Judge Sunnatilla Avlakulov of Zangiota District Court in Tashkent Region added 10 years to the existing 11 year prison term of prisoner of conscience Abduvokhidov. His "crime" was to be three minutes late for a prison roll call.

It appears that the regime selected prisoner of conscience Abduvokhidov for special targeting. In October 2023, almost two months beforehand, his home mahalla of Uygonish in Tashkent's Mirzo Ulugbek District held a meeting to discuss his original "crime" of meeting with others to pray and discuss Islam. The regime called the meeting "to provide the population with broad understanding and information on crime prevention".

At the mahalla meeting, officials made false claims that prisoner of conscience Abduvokhidov had asked for a pardon for his "crime".

Throughout 2024, regime prison officials repeatedly pressured prisoner of conscience Abduvokhidov to admit his "guilt" and write to Shavkat Mirziyoyev (who has never faced a free and fair election to become President) asking for a pardon. Abduvokhidov refused to do this as he had not committed the crimes the regime had falsely accused him of, a human rights defender who wished to

remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 in February 2025.

Karshi: False claims of alleged "terrorism", torture, use of agent provocateurs

In the case of Fariduddin Abduvokhidov and other cases of Muslims being jailed for meeting to discuss Islam, the regime has used false claims of alleged "terrorism", torture, and the use of agent provocateurs.

The latest such known case was in December 2024, when Karshi Criminal Court jailed eight Muslim men – four of them former prisoners of conscience – for between six and 10 years (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2953) for meeting together to discuss Islam. Police threatened the men's families that if they appealed the jail terms would be increased.

The eight men - Laziz Vokhidov, Khasan Abdirakhimov, Gaybullo Jalilov, Khayrullo Tursunov, Anvar Abdullayev, Sardor Jurayev, Jamshid Abdirakhimov (Khasan's brother), and Umar Khalimov - did appeal to Kashkadarya Regional Court. Judge Khamid Bobokulov began hearing the appeal on 2 February, according to court records.

At a hearing on 16 April, Kashkadarya Regional Court announced that it will issue the appeal verdict on 30 April, relatives of the eight men told Forum 18 on 17 April. "Lawyers demanded that the court drop the criminal charges since the defendants have not committed any crimes, and that there is no proof of any crimes in the case files," the relatives explained.

The eight prisoners of conscience are still being held in Investigation Prison No. 5 in Karshi, known locally as Shaykhali prison after the village where it is located. The prison address:

Uzbekistan

Kashkadarya viloyati

Karshi tumani

Shayxali qurqoni

IIB JIEB 5-sonli tergov xibisxonasi

Sultonov: Prisoner of conscience put in isolation cell in new prison

Prison authorities transferred prisoner of conscience Alimardon Islamovich Sultonov (born 26 October 1983) on 30 January to a stricter regime prison in Navoi (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2960) as a punishment. His parents complained to Forum 18 that they believe that he was targeted by his previous prison authorities "because the prison did not break his spirit and he still continues to be a devout Muslim".

On 27 May 2022, a court in Karakalpakstan jailed trauma surgeon Sultonov, a devout Muslim known for discussing Muslim freedom of religion and belief issues, for seven years in a labour camp (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2745) "for criticising President Mirziyoyev, state-appointed imams .." The regime used both torture and two regime-appointed "parliamentarians" (<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan>) to try to get him to admit "guilt".

In 2025, the administration of Navoi Prison No. 36 in Bessapon placed Sultonov once again – for the third time in a year (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2930) - in a punishment cell for five days between 8 and 13 January for allegedly fighting with an older prisoner. Navoi Region's Tomdi District Criminal Court then decided on 16 January that prisoner of conscience Sultonov should be sent to a stricter regime prison. Against the law, the Court has not provided Sultonov or his family with a copy of the verdict.

Rakhima Masharipova, Sultonov's mother told Forum 18 on 27 March that she visited him in Navoi Prison No. 4 on 25 February. She complained that the new prison authorities "already managed to put him in an isolation cell for refusing to clean the toilets". She explained that Sultonov "told the prison authorities that he will do any other jobs except that one because he was specifically told that they intended to insult him and his faith and make him a show case for others through this job". The prison administration then put Sultonov in an isolation cell for 15 days in February.

Masharipova also complained that Sultonov was dressed "in shabby and dirty prison uniform with many patches and holes". She added that "thank Allah, he was not sick and did not complain to us about other things".

Ravshan Shernazarov, Governor of Navoi Prison No. 4, introduced himself on 15 April but put the phone down when Forum 18 asked about Sultonov. His phone was switched off later when Forum 18 several times tried to reach him.

Sultonov's prison address:

Uzbekistan

Navoi shakhar

Navoi kuchasi 5

4 sonli Jazoni Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

(END)

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Uzbekistan (<https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=33>)

For background information, see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351)

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