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UZBEKISTAN: Forum 18 reporter officially deported

By John Kinahan, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

The Uzbek government has now (13 August) officially deported Forum 18 News Service's Central Asia Correspondent, Igor Rotar, after detaining him without justification at Tashkent Airport on 11 August. The detention was ordered, so Forum 18 was told, "for political reasons at the highest levels," on the instructions of the National Security Service secret police. Initially the Uzbek intention was to try and force Igor to buy his own ticket out and claim that he was not deported, but his principled strong objections to this tactic resulted in his official deportation. Igor Rotar's unjustified detention in Uzbekistan attracted strong expressions of support and concern from a wide range of individuals, human rights organisations, foreign ministries and news and other international organisations.

Forum 18 and Igor Rotar would like to say a very big THANK YOU to everyone who by their prayers and practical actions helped end this totally unjustified detention.

The case has shown how religious freedom is an excellent "litmus test" of the state of human rights, and that attention should remain on the extremely grave human rights situation still faced by Uzbekistan's people.

The Uzbek government has now (13 August) officially deported Forum 18 News Service's Central Asia Correspondent, Igor Rotar. Initially the Uzbek intention was to try and force Igor to buy his own ticket and claim that he was not deported, but his principled strong objections to this tactic resulted in his official deportation.

Reliable sources told Forum 18 that the unjustified 11 August detention was ordered "for political reasons at the highest levels," and that it was carried out on the instructions of the National Security Service secret police (see F18News 11 August 2005 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=627).

Uzbekistan's unjustified detention and formal deportation of a widely respected religious freedom reporter, along with the continued crackdown on the independent media, raises many serious issues of freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom to defend human rights and the safety of journalists carrying out their legitimate work. The Uzbek government has thus unintentionally shown how religious freedom is an excellent "litmus test" of the state of human rights in any society. It has also caused world attention to be focussed once more on the very serious human rights abuses committed by the Uzbek government against its own people.

Igor Rotar's unjustified detention and subsequent formal deportation from Uzbekistan attracted strong expressions of support and concern from a wide range of individuals, human rights organisations, foreign ministries and other international organisations across the world. Amongst the very many who took practical steps to assist Igor Rotar and Forum 18 were (in a by no means exhaustive alphabetical list) Amnesty International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Dansk Europamission, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, the International Helsinki Federation, International Religious Freedom Watch, the International Religious Liberty Association, the Norsk Misjon i Øst, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Reporters Without Borders, several foreign ministries and a range of news organisations worldwide.

Some of those who have provided essential help have requested anonymity, but Forum 18 is as deeply grateful to them as we are to those we can publicly name.

Forum 18 and Igor Rotar would like to say a very big THANK YOU to everyone who by their prayers and practical actions helped end this totally unjustified detention. We are extremely grateful to you all for your excellent help.

Sadly, the state of religious freedom and other internationally agreed human rights in Uzbekistan continues to give cause for deep concern. Forum 18 asks that attention remains focussed on the serious issues faced every day by the people of Uzbekistan.

More details of Igor Rotar's unjustified detention and deportation will be published by Forum 18 next week.

(END)

For a personal commentary by a Muslim scholar, advocating religious freedom for all faiths as the best antidote to Islamic religious extremism in Uzbekistan, see http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=338

For more background, see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=546

For an outline of the repression immediately following the Andijan uprising, see F18News 23 May http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=567 and for an outline of what is known about Akramia and the uprising see 16 June http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=586

A printer-friendly map of Uzbekistan is available at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=asia&Rootmap=uzbeki>

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