

1 June 2016

Kyrgyzstan – Harassment of the family of human rights defender Azimjan Askarov

On 25 May 2016, approximately twenty people, including persons in military uniform, court bailiffs and representatives of the State Property Fund of Kyrgyzstan (SPFK), called to the house of human rights defender Mr **Azimjan Askarov** in Bazar-Korgon village, Zhalal-Abad region, in order to prepare official documents for confiscation of the property by the State.

[Azimjan Askarov](#) is a prominent human rights defender in Kyrgyzstan and founder of the human rights organization **Vozdukh (Air)**. He has investigated and reported cases of police abuse and poor prison conditions in Kyrgyzstan, and as a result has been a target of the authorities. Following the judgement of the Bazar-Kurgan district Court on 15 September 2010, the human rights defender is currently serving life imprisonment. On 21 April 2016, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee called on the government of Kyrgyzstan to free Azimjan Askarov on the basis that he was subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment, and violations of his right to a fair trial.

On 25 May 2016, approximately twenty people, including court bailiffs and representatives of the SPFK, arrived at Azimjan Askarov's house for the “purpose of confiscation of the property into the possession of the State”, as they explained to the human rights defender's wife who was present at the time. The people inspected the property, took an inventory and photographs, and then left. Following this, when Azimjan Askarov's legal counsel contacted representatives of the Department of the SPFK in Bazar-Korgon village and the city of Zhalal-Abad regarding the incident, neither was able to provide an official order permitting the confiscation of the human rights defender's property. Instead, the counsel was directed to the SPFK in Bishkek to receive this information. Subsequently the legal counsel received an explanatory note from the SPFK, explaining that the order to confiscate Azimjan Askarov's house was based on a letter from the Office of Court Bailiffs of Bazar-Korgon district dated 3 March 2016. The Office informed the SPFK that the property of the human rights defender had to be transferred to the State in compliance with an earlier decision of the Bazar-Korgon district Court.

This is not the first attempt by the Kyrgyz government to confiscate Azimjan Askarov's house. There is a pending appeal against the decision of one of the court bailiffs in relation to the confiscation of the property. The decision to confiscate the human rights defender's home was adopted despite a clear prohibition, provided in the Penal Enforcement Code of Kyrgyzstan, to confiscate the house of a convicted person if his or her family lives there on a permanent basis. Azimjan Askarov's house, where his wife and children live, is their only residence and therefore according to Kyrgyz law, cannot be taken away from them, even on a court's order. In view of this, Azimjan Askarov's legal counsel is of the opinion that the intention of the SPFK was not to confiscate the property, but rather to exert pressure on the human rights defender and his family.

Front Line Defenders condemns the harassment of the Azimjan Askarov's family, which it believes is directly linked to his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights in Kyrgyzstan.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to:

1. Immediately cease all further harassment, and ensure protection, of Azimjan Askarov's family, as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of Azimjan Askarov's legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights in Kyrgyzstan;
2. Implement recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee from 21 April 2016 by releasing jailed human rights defender Azimjan Askarov and quashing his conviction, as it is widely believed that he has been sentenced solely on account of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work in Kyrgyzstan;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.