

Ambassador H.E. Mr Said Rustamov
Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan
41 Holland Park
London W11 3RP
United Kingdom

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the 49-year-old Muslim man named Tulkun Astanov. In November 2020 he was sentenced to five years in jail because of his efforts to peacefully defend the right to freedom of religion and belief for Muslims. One such example is when Astanov defended the right for two women to wear the hijab in a Tashkent court.

The indictment claimed that extremist material related to the ISIS terrorist organization was found on Astanov's mobile phone. However, the accusers have been unable to bring forth the evidence for such material or prove any link between the terrorist group and content on Astanov's phone. On social media, Astanov published no such extremist material, only teachings from the prophet Muhammad and content regarding religious festivals for Muslims. Astanov also warned his social media followers about ISIS.

Your Excellency, please allow me to bring to your attention the poor treatment Astanov has experienced while in prison. He has been tortured and beaten by prison guards, leaving him with bruises on his body and face, merely for praying his daily prayers. They have also further denied him reading the Koran. After suffering from poor health and internal bleeding, Astanov was sent to a hospital for surgery, however immediately sent back to prison.

Astanov's situation is not unique. Other prisoners in Uzbekistan are also denied their right to religious freedom, being denied praying their daily prayers or reading from the Koran. In addition, some have been subject to torture for fasting during Ramadan, denied medical care and not received the medical treatment paid for by their families. The UN has expressed concern of the worrying conditions and poor treatment of prisoners in Uzbekistan.

I firmly believe that Uzbekistan is a nation that seeks to protect their citizens by upholding the binding international human rights obligations that they have committed to follow; also, the commitment to the United Nations Standard Minimum rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. I, therefore, humbly petition your intervention to ensure that:

- Tulkun Astanov is released immediately and reunited with his family
- Uzbekistan's authorities respectfully honour the basic human right of expressing one's religion and belief, including the right to express their critique of authorities if there be a lack of this freedom
- Prison authorities who have practised torture on prisoners will be held accountable and punished for this behaviour.

Sincerely,