

## PRESS RELEASE

### Uzbek authorities should cease harassment and intimidation of independent journalists

**Paris, January 14, 2010** - In a context of tension towards civil society linked to the parliamentary elections of December 27, 2009, independent journalists are facing renewed pressure. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Mr. Vassili Markov, Mr. Sid Yanyshhev, Mr. Abdoumalik Boboyev, Ms. Marina Kozlova and former correspondent for "Radio Liberty" in Uzbekistan Mr. Khoustitdin Koutbitdinov

were summoned by the Tashkent prosecutor's office, Mr. Bakhrom Nourmatov. Mr. Vassili Markov and Mr. Abdoumalik Boboyev refused the meeting arguing that they had not received any official notification.

During the meetings, an officer of the prosecutor's office presented to the journalists files containing information on their private and professional lives and informed them that the files had been transmitted to him by the Services of National Security (SNB). Mr. Sid Yanyshhev reported that the journalists were questioned about international conferences and seminars they attended, money transfers allegedly received from abroad during the past years, and "links" they had with foreign embassies, in particular with the US representation in Tashkent.

The journalists were harshly criticized for giving a partial vision of Uzbek reality in their articles. Although they were free to go and no charges were brought against them, FIDH fears in a context of constant political repression in Uzbekistan that the journalists may face further harassment for "tarnishing the image of Uzbekistan". Indeed, on December 16, 2009, the photographer Umida Akhmedova was accused of "slander" and "insult" under articles 139 and 140 of the Uzbek Criminal Code for her photographs published in the book "Women and Men: From Dawn to Dusk" presenting photos of everyday life in the country. Ms Akhmedova is facing up to six months' imprisonment or two to three years of "correctional work".

FIDH expresses its deepest concern about the increasing pressure on journalists and civil society representatives in general

, which seems to merely aim at silencing them.

#### **FIDH calls the Uzbek government to:**

- end state censorship of all forms of protected expression;
- cease harassment and intimidation of independent journalists working in the country;
- unconditionally release journalists detained for their professional activities;
- allow international media forced to stop working in Uzbekistan, to register their bureaus;
- issue an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, as well as the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders.
- and more generally, guarantee the right to freedom of expression, in line with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Uzbekistan is a State Party.

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