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# Uzbekistan: Investigate Death in Custody, Torture

## Brothers Opposed Extortion, Threatened to Expose Corruption

(Paris) – Uzbek authorities should ensure a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the alleged torture of two brothers by the Uzbek National Security Service (SNB), and the death in custody of one of them, Human Rights Watch, the International Partnership for Human Rights, Freedom House, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia said today.

Ilhom Ibodov, who died in a National Security Service detention facility in Bukhara in September 2015, was allegedly tortured before he died as was his brother, Rahim Ibodov, who is currently serving an eight-year sentence. Both men, who had refused to comply with extortion demands and had threatened to expose alleged corruption by security service, were arrested for “administrative violations” and later charged with bogus tax and other commercial offences.

“The death of Ilhom Ibodov in custody, and the serious allegations of ill-treatment that preceded it, underscore the brutal reality of Uzbekistan’s torture problem,” said **Steve Swerdlow**, Central Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Ibodov’s arrest, torture and death mock the government’s claims that it is seriously tackling the problems of torture and corruption alike.”

Ibodov, an entrepreneur from the western city of Bukhara, died on September 13, 2015 in security service custody after he threatened to expose an alleged corruption scheme within the agency and was charged with bogus commercial fraud offenses. The National Security Service is widely regarded as the most powerful and most feared institution in **Uzbekistan**. Ibodov’s relatives provided the human rights groups with a credible account by witnesses and photographs of his body, which a forensic expert concluded corroborate allegations that Ibodov was tortured. The relatives said that one scheme involved the alleged fraudulent acquisition of land by one of the arresting security service officers.

Evidence surrounding Ibodov’s death, including his alleged torture, emerged from an investigation by his relatives. As part of their inquiries, they sought the opinion of an independent medical expert,



Ilhom Ibodov.  
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who examined photographs of Ibodov's body taken after the security service returned it to them for burial. The expert concluded that the photographs indicated injuries consistent with blunt force trauma and other wounds that could have resulted from torture.

Rahim Ibodov provided a detailed account to relatives of the mens' treatment in custody. He said that officials at a security service detention center where they were first held told the mens' cellmates to beat them, and that the brothers were severely beaten repeatedly for the 25 days they spent there. The brothers were then moved to another security service facility, where, Rahim Ibodov said, three of the officers who had demanded bribes, beat his brother to death.

Relatives told the rights groups that authorities returned Ilhom Ibodov's body to them in Bukhara on September 13 and pressured them to bury the body by the next day. In November, authorities provided Ilhom's mother with a death certificate listing the cause of death as "heart attack."

International human rights groups asked an independent medical forensic expert from outside Uzbekistan, who has worked as chief of medical services for a government ministry as well as a consultant for human rights organizations to examine photographs and video of Ilhom Ibodov's body taken by family members on the day it was returned to them. The expert said that the images showed wounds around both ankles, a possible result of being shackled or bound with rope, and hematomas on his lower back, buttocks, shoulder, and the sole of his feet consistent with blunt force. The expert concluded that these and other marks were consistent with allegations of torture.



Rahim Ibodov.  
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On February 15, 2016, a Bukhara criminal court sentenced Rahim Ibodov to eight years in prison for "illegal acquisition of foreign currency," tax evasion, commercial trading and services violations, and money laundering. The judge ignored Ibodov's statements in court that he and his brother had been beaten and that their confession was obtained through torture. He is serving his sentence in Tavaksay prison colony UYa 64/3 in the Tashkent region.

Uzbek authorities have repeatedly tried to intimidate Ilhom's relatives and threatened that Rahim Ibodov will "never leave prison alive" if they continue to press for answers about Ilhom Ibodov's death. To date, the family has written 160 petitions to various Uzbek government authorities, including 25 letters to the late President Islam Karimov and now interim President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, asking for an investigation into the torture of the brothers, Ilhom Mirziyoyev's death in custody, and Rahim's trial and sentence. Authorities have not meaningfully responded to any of the appeals. Nor has an investigation into Ilhom's death or the torture allegations been ordered.

"As a mother, I only want one thing – for my son Rahim to be released and justice for those who tortured my sons and killed Ilhom," Khursand Rajabova, the men's mother, told human rights groups. "Yes, my daughter and I have been threatened for appealing to human rights activists and journalists. But I will not be silent because I am certain that truth and a mother's love are stronger."

The Uzbek government, led by interim president Shavkat Mirziyoyev, should guarantee an effective investigation of the circumstances of Ibodov's death, allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to monitor detention sites, allow non-governmental organizations into the country, invite the United Nations special rapporteur on torture to visit in accordance with his mandate, and bring national laws and practices into compliance with its international obligations to prevent and combat torture, the groups said.

For more than a decade, the UN special rapporteur for torture, the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Human Rights Committee, the US State Department, and numerous decisions of the European Court of Human Rights have recognized the widespread nature of torture in Uzbekistan's prisons and places of

detention. For 14 years, Uzbekistan has denied access to all 14 UN experts who have requested invitations, including the UN special rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders and on torture, and has failed to comply with recommendations made by various expert bodies. In April 2013, the government's interference with the ICRC's prison monitoring led it to end its prison visitation program.

"Ibodov's death is highly suspicious and demands a thorough and independent investigation and prosecution of anyone found responsible," said Brigitte Dufour, director of the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR). "The Uzbek government should also allow for regular, unfettered, independent, expert monitoring of prison conditions, invite UN experts to visit the country, and bring its laws and practices in line with international standards to help prevent such deaths in the future."



Khursand Rajabova.  
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The UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions call for the "thorough, prompt and impartial investigation" of all suspicious deaths in custody to "determine the cause, manner and time of death, the person responsible, and any pattern or practice which may have brought about that death." The principles state that "families of the deceased and their legal representatives shall be informed of, and have access to, any hearing as well as to all information relevant to the investigation, and shall be entitled to present other evidence."

Uzbekistan's international partners, including the US and EU, should make clear that unless the Uzbek government makes measurable improvements in human rights, they will impose targeted restrictions such as visa bans and asset freezes against Uzbek government entities and individuals responsible for grave human rights violations, including torture, the rights groups said. They should also seek to establish a special rapporteur devoted to Uzbekistan's human rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

"The Ibodov family needs more than our sympathy," said Nadejda Atayeva, president of the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia. "They need justice, swift action from Uzbekistan's international partners, and an end to the impunity for torture and abuse that reigns supreme in Uzbekistan."

### **A Brother's Account of Death by Torture**

On August 16, 2015, National Security Service officers detained Ilhom and Rahim Ibodov at the *Sitora* car market in Bukhara, where they sold car accessories, stereos, and music. Relatives told Human Rights Watch that for several years, SNB officers and other officials had extorted bribes from the men to allow them to run their business. Just before their detention, the brothers had refused to continue paying large bribes and threatened to file an official complaint about extortion and racketeering, their relatives said. The relatives believe senior officers in the Bukhara regional SNB and tax department, ordered the men's detention.

Rahim Ibodov told his family that they were brought before a court, which sanctioned their arrest for "administrative violations" first for 10 days and then again for another 15. The brothers were held at a temporary detention facility (IVS) of the Bukhara Department of Internal Affairs for those 25 days.

On the day of their arrest, a Bukhara police officer and an SNB officer told the men they would be immediately released if they agreed to sign a false confession, but otherwise would be detained indefinitely. Rahim Ibodov said that the confession stated falsely that the two used forced laborers, owned unauthorized trucks, and were receiving illegal foreign currency every month from abroad, and that Rahim Ibodov had illegally traveled with his mother to Mecca for the annual Hajj pilgrimage through neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

Rahim Ibodov later told his family that throughout their detention, officials encouraged four of their cellmates—the names of whom are known to the human rights groups but are not disclosed here for safety reasons—to beat the two brothers harshly as punishment for their plans to expose alleged corruption by SNB officers. The inmates beat the men daily. Rahim Ibodov said that his brother was beaten especially

severely after he refused to provide further false testimony and continued to threaten to expose the officers' involvement in various corruption schemes.

Rahim Ibodov later recalled that the cellmates had used something like rope to bind his and Ilhom's feet together, and that they had been beaten on the soles of their feet.

On September 10, prosecutors charged the two men with "illegal acquisition of foreign currency" (under article 177(a)(b) of the Uzbek Criminal Code); tax evasion (article 184(3)); commercial trading and services violations (article 189), and money laundering (article 243).

Later that night or on September 11, security service officers transferred the men to a permanent SNB detention facility in Bukhara, where the two brothers were put in facing basement cells. On the way there, Ilhom Ibodov asked his brother to take care of Ilhom's family in the event of his death.

On September 12, Rahim Ibodov told relatives that he saw through the open door of his brother's cell three officers standing over him and begin to beat him. Rahim Ibodov identified the three officers as Azim Yunusov, head of the inspections department of the Bukhara SNB, an officer he knew as Bahodir whose surname he does not know, and an officer he knew as Inom whose surname he does not know but he believes was from the SNB's anti-corruption department. He knew the officers because the officers had for several years extorted the bribe s from the brothers. Rahim Ibodov told his family that he saw the officers landing continuous blows all over his brother's body, including to his kidneys, shoulders, and chest.

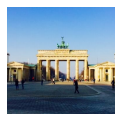
Rahim Ibodov told relatives that the officer who he knew as Bahodir stepped on Ilhom Ibodov's chest with both feet and yelled, "If we kill you, no one will ask us about what happened! No one!" Then the three began to hit and kick Ilhom Ibodov vigorously again. Rahim Ibodov said he believes his brother Ilhom lost consciousness at this stage. The officers summoned a doctor into the cell to examine Ilhom Ibodov. Rahim called to the doctor, begging her to help his brother. He said she answered: "I will help him once he's dead."

Region / Country Europe/Central Asia, Uzbekistan

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