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REVIEW OF TURKMENISTAN UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

**Submission to the United Nations Human Rights
Committee ahead of its adoption of a list of issues, at
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Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) is the successor organization of the Helsinki Group of Turkmenistan and was registered as an independent association in Vienna in November 2004. Through a network of local experts and activists inside Turkmenistan, TIHR monitors and reports on the human rights situation in this country. It also disseminates independent news, comments and analysis from and about Turkmenistan.

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Introduction

This is a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee ahead of its adoption of a list of issues for the review of Turkmenistan's third periodic report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It has been jointly prepared by Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), drawing on their ongoing cooperation on documenting fundamental rights developments in Turkmenistan. It is based on information obtained by TIHR through its monitoring of the situation in Turkmenistan with the help of an in-country network of activists, as well as information from other independent organizations, which monitor and report on developments in the country.

Under the current authoritarian rule of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, Turkmenistan remains **one of the world's most closed and repressive countries**. Its authorities severely restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, in violation of the country's obligations under the ICCPR. The current submission **covers the implementation of the ICCPR in a number of key areas**. It highlights the wide-ranging restrictions on the freedom of expression seen in Turkmenistan, including state media control, internet censorship and lack of government transparency on issues of public concern such as the national Covid-19 outbreak, which the authorities have persistently denied. The submission also documents the lack of space for independent human rights NGOs and opposition political parties to operate in the country, increasing persecution of civil society members both at home and abroad (including through their relatives) and suppression of rare spontaneous protests in a context of continued forcible mobilization of residents for state-organized mass events. In addition, the submission draws attention to the ongoing problems of politically motivated imprisonment, torture and disappearances; the harsh prison conditions in the country; and the continued use of forced labour in the cotton harvest.

Denial and cover-up of Covid-19 pandemic and other crises (articles 19, 6, 17)

The Turkmenistani government tightly controls the flow of information in the country, uses state media outlets as propaganda tools and restricts access to alternative sources of information (see more in the next chapter). To promote its own positive narratives of the situation in the country, the government also **denies and covers up developments that may reflect badly on the authorities**.

For example, the government has **failed to acknowledge the scope and extent of the protracted economic crisis**, which the country has been experiencing for the last few years, and has sought to conceal manifestations of this crisis (such as long lines outside stores selling rationed food products at state subsidized prices).¹ Another example of the government's cover-up policies was seen following a devastating hurricane that hit Turkmenistan in April 2020. Instead of focusing on assisting the victims of this natural disaster, the authorities **went after citizens believed to have shared photos and video clips of the havoc caused by the hurricane** with relatives and other contacts living abroad. According to TIHR's information, several dozen people were detained and warned on these grounds and two women faced criminal charges for allegedly insulting officials when questioning the actions taken against them.²

The **government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic fits into the same pattern**: it has persistently claimed that the pandemic has not reached the country, although independent sources have reported about a serious national outbreak.³ This has resulted in Turkmenistan being one of the few countries in the world (along with North Korea and some small island nations) to have reported no Covid-19 cases since the start of the global pandemic.⁴

As part of its policy of Covid-19 denial, the government has **pressured medical workers** to participate in covering up the national Covid-19 outbreak and threatened them with repercussions should they leak information about Covid-19 cases.⁵ In an attempt to prevent medical workers from documenting and sharing Covid-19 related information, the authorities have reportedly banned doctors treating suspected Covid-19 patients from using their mobile phones at work and carried out inspections of the phones of medical workers working at such facilities.⁶ Medical professionals have also faced **intimidation for raising concerns** about the lack of adequate resources for the diagnosis and treatment of people with acute respiratory conditions indicative of Covid-19.⁷

According to information obtained by TIHR and other independent organizations, the authorities **prevented a delegation from the World Health Organization (WHO) from finding out the real state of affairs with respect to Covid-19** during a visit to Turkmenistan in summer 2020. In particular, the authorities transferred patients with Covid-19 symptoms out of the hospitals the WHO experts were due to visit.⁸ Following their visit, the WHO experts stopped short of saying that the virus was present in the country but stated that they were "extremely concerned" about "numerous reports of an increasing number of acute respiratory infections or pneumonia of unknown origin" and called on the authorities to "take the same measures as in those countries where the virus has begun to spread".⁹ Later, in a media interview in November 2021, a senior WHO official said that: "From the scientific point of view, it's unlikely that the [Corona]virus is not circulating in Turkmenistan".¹⁰

In accordance with the WHO's recommendations, the Turkmenistani government has initiated measures aimed at preventing the spread of Covid-19, but these measures have been selectively enforced and the authorities have **failed to explain the real purpose** of them to citizens. For example, the authorities have referred to the allegedly increased levels of dust in the air and the alleged risk of viruses being carried by airborne currents from abroad to justify such measures. Moreover, the government has failed to comply with its pledge to allow the WHO to independently gather Covid-19 samples in the country and bring them to its laboratories for testing.¹¹

As part of the cover-up efforts of authorities, relatives of people who have died to due Covid-19 like symptoms have received the bodies of their loved ones in sealed packages and been requested to bury them immediately without opening the packages.¹²

Because of its cover-up and denial policies in relation to Covid-19, the Turkmenistani government has **not only violated citizens' right to have access to information** on issues of public importance but **also jeopardized their lives and well-being**.

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani authorities should be requested to:

- Explain their failure to acknowledge the public health crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic and to take adequate measures to inform citizens about this crisis and protect their lives and well-being at this time.
- Provide an update on their cooperation with the WHO on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular their pledge to allow for independent Covid-19 sampling and testing by the WHO.
- Explain how the authorities will safeguard the right of citizens to document, share information and raise concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic or other issues of public concern without facing retaliatory measures.

Media control and restrictions on access to alternative information (article 19)

Media control

Turkmenistan's Law on Mass Media, adopted in 2012¹³, safeguards freedom of the media, obliges the state to guarantee media independence and pluralism, and prohibits censorship and unlawful interference in the activities of media. However, in practice, **the media situation remains extremely repressive**, with Turkmenistan consistently being ranked at the bottom of international surveys, such as the well-known World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders. In the 2021 edition of this index Turkmenistan ranked 178th, with only North Korea and Eritrea behind.¹⁴

As previously, there are **no truly independent media outlets in the country**, and all national media outlets (including the few privately owned print media outlets) are **subjected to state control and interference with their editorial policies**, which both directly and indirectly result in censorship. In particular, the Turkmenistani authorities use state-owned media as platforms for the dissemination of state-dictated information about the situation in the country and the government's policies. President Berdymukhamedov has publicly called on national media outlets to focus on reporting about positive developments and achievements of the government.¹⁵ Journalists working with independent media outlets based abroad face persecution (see more in the chapter on civil society).

Restrictions on internet access

Turkmenistan's Law on Mass Media protects the right of citizens to enjoy unimpeded access to foreign media products, and the authorities have committed themselves to ensuring unhindered access to different sources of information, including the internet.¹⁶

However, in practice, **the authorities restrict access to information from foreign sources, in particular through the internet**. Internet access in Turkmenistan remains **slow and expensive compared to international standards**. The Speedtest Global Index ranked Turkmenistan third last on its list of the average speed of fixed broadband connections in October 2021,¹⁷ while the site Cable.co.uk ranked Turkmenistan last in its assessment of broadband speed in 224 countries and territories across the world in the period from mid-2020 to mid-2021.¹⁸

Although the state monopoly internet provider, *Turkmentelekom* decreased its rates in February 2021 following an order from the president, its services nevertheless remain expensive in relation to the level of

income in the country. Thus, the cheapest unlimited internet access rate offered by this provider now comes at a monthly cost of 100 manat (around 24 EUR at the official exchange rate) for city residents and 50 manat (around 12 EUR) for rural residents,¹⁹ compared to the minimum monthly salary of 957 manat (around 230 EUR)²⁰. The **internet penetration rate in the country remains comparatively low**, although it has increased in recent years. There are no reliable official statistics, but according to the Digital report, internet penetration in Turkmenistan was 33% as of the beginning of 2021.²¹

Moreover, internet access is **heavily censored**. Many social media networks, messenger apps and independent Turkmenistan-covering websites have been arbitrarily blocked in the country. An investigative report published in 2019 by Quriium, a Swedish-based non-profit organization focusing on digital security, found that the Turkmenistani authorities use several different techniques (DNS spoofing, HTTP Host Header Inspection and IP blocking) to restrict access to online resources, including more than 130 of the most popular websites worldwide.²²

Blocked online resources are only accessible in the country with the help of internet circumvention tools such as virtual private networks (VPNs). At the same time, the authorities have recently **stepped up their campaign against VPNs**, including by systematically blocking such tools and intimidating individuals using them to access sites featuring information critical of the authorities.²³ For example, in December 2020, the security services reportedly summoned at least ten people living in Lebap region, questioning them about why they were watching online video content critical of the situation in Turkmenistan and pressuring them to sign statements saying that they would stop accessing such resources.²⁴ There have also reportedly been cases in which service providers have been detained and fined for installing VPN applications on clients' devices,²⁵ and in which residents have been forced to swear on the Koran that they will not use VPNs when applying for internet connections.²⁶

Independent Turkmenistan-covering websites, such as TIHR's site²⁷ are regularly **subjected to cyberattacks** believed to originate from the Turkmenistani authorities. While TIHR has been able to successfully navigate most attacks, some particularly powerful ones have resulted in temporary disruptions to the site. In another recent trend, the government has **abused mechanisms for reporting copyright violations on social media platforms** in its attempts to obstruct access to independent sources that report critically about the situation in Turkmenistan. In several cases, complaints filed by government associated accounts have resulted in takedowns and blockings of video material published on You Tube by independent groups, although these have complied with fair use requirements. For example, the YouTube channels of both TIHR²⁸ and the US-based Eurasianet news organization²⁹ were closed down on such grounds in 2021.

Continued campaign against satellite dishes

In a campaign going on for years, the Turkmenistani authorities have **forcibly dismantled privately owned satellite dishes devices**, which residents use to watch and listen to foreign TV and radio channels that offer more interesting and independent programmes than national state-owned channels. The authorities have argued that satellite dishes "spoil the appearance" of residential buildings. This campaign has continued since the Human Rights Committee reviewed Turkmenistan's second periodic report in March 2017. For example, in April 2018, TIHR reported that several hundred satellite dishes had been forcibly taken down in the city of Turkmenabat.³⁰ Moreover, while the campaign against satellite dishes initially was carried out primarily in the capital and other large cities, it was thereafter extended to other parts of the country. In mid-2018, the Prague-based Turkmen service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio *Azatlyk*

reported about widespread measures to dismantle satellite dishes in rural areas.³¹ As a result of this campaign, the number of satellite dishes has significantly decreased in the country. While the authorities have made some efforts to provide access to cable TV or internet protocol television (IPTV) instead, such efforts do not appear to have been systematic. In addition, these alternative solutions have come with additional costs for residents, as well as strings on the content available³², and there have been complaints about temporary disruptions in access.

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani authorities should be requested to:

- Provide information on concrete steps taken to enforce the provisions of the Law on Mass Media, which protect media independence and prohibit censorship, and to comply with the Committee's recommendation to promote an enabling environment for the establishment and operation of media free from undue state influence or interference.
- Describe the measures adopted to promote unhindered, affordable and speedy internet access for residents of the country, and to ensure that any restrictions on access to online content meet the strict requirements of article 19 of the ICCPR, in accordance with the Committee's recommendation.
- Explain the steps taken to protect the right of citizens to have access to foreign sources of information through TV and radio, in accordance with Turkmenistan's obligations under article 19 of the ICCPR.

Persecution of civil society members (articles 19, 21, 22 and 14, 7, 9)

The Turkmenistani authorities have recently **increased pressure on critical voices** in response to growing expressions of discontent with the government, in particular through social media platforms and during rallies against the government's repressive policies held by Turkmenistani migrant communities abroad.³³ In their widening crackdown on dissent, the authorities have targeted **both outspoken activists who live outside Turkmenistan** and **individuals inside the country** who have publicly criticized the government's policies and/or who have been in contact with groups or activists abroad. **Relatives of activists** have also been subjected to intimidation.

Targeting critical voices inside Turkmenistan

Any kind of civic engagement perceived as threatening by the authorities may result in persecution in Turkmenistan. The serious risks associated with this kind of engagement are illustrated by a number of recent cases in which individuals living in the country have been **prosecuted on spurious criminal charges** after daring to stand up for their rights, speak out against injustices and communicate with independent Turkmenistani groups and activists based abroad:

- On 16 July 2021, Turkmenistani law enforcement authorities arbitrarily detained **Khursanai Ismatullaeva**, an Ashgabat-based doctor who has been struggling for justice for several years after

being unfairly dismissed from a perinatal clinic.³⁴ As her complaints to different state bodies did not lead anywhere, she turned to exile-based human rights groups for help. Her detention came the day after her case was raised at an online event organized by Members of the European Parliament to discuss the human rights situation in Central Asia. For almost two weeks, there was no information about Ismatullaeva's whereabouts or the grounds for her detention; after this, it turned out that she was being held in pre-trial detention on criminal charges brought against her.³⁵ On 7 September 2021, Ismatullaeva was sentenced to nine years in prison on charges of fraud, forgery of documents and taking advantage of a dependent person – all offenses allegedly committed in relation to an elderly, disabled man, whom she had previously cared for. At the trial, she was not assisted by any lawyer of her own choice as all lawyers her family approached refused to take up the case given its politically sensitive nature. Human rights defenders are convinced that the criminal case against Ismatullaeva was initiated to penalize her for speaking out about her struggle for justice and seeking support from exiled-based human rights groups to this end.³⁶

- **Nurgeldy Khalykov** is currently serving a four-year prison sentence on fraud charges believed to be retaliation for his cooperation with the Netherlands-based Turkmen News.³⁷ A local Ashgabat court handed down the sentence on 15 September 2020, allegedly based on a complaint that Khalykov had failed to repay a private debt. Khalykov was first detained in July 2020 after sharing with Turkmen News an innocuous photo of WHO representatives who visited Turkmenistan that month to investigate the Covid-19 situation in the country. The photo had been taken by Khalykov's former schoolmate who posted it on Instagram. At the time of his detention, Khalykov had cooperated clandestinely with Turkmen News for several years and contributed information on different topics, including the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁸ Turkmen News believes that the authorities found out about his work for the organization during questioning and fears that he might have been subjected to ill-treatment in detention.³⁹ Among others, UN special procedures have raised concerns about Khalykov's case, including the "allegedly meritless charges, judicial harassment and seemingly arbitrary detention" facing him.⁴⁰
- On 16 August 2021, a court in Dashoguz reportedly sentenced **Murat Dushemov** to four years in prison on charges believed to be retaliation for his civic engagement, including his online criticism of the government and his attempts to question Covid-19 preventive measures imposed by the government, despite its denial of the national outbreak.⁴¹ In an incident in June 2021, of which Dushemov posted a video on YouTube, he requested a doctor at an Ashgabat medical clinic to show the government order based on which compulsory vaccinations against Covid-19 were carried out.⁴² The doctor subsequently accused Dushemov of extorting money in exchange for leaving the video unpublished.⁴³ In another incident, Dushemov, his friend and his friend's wife were stopped by police and asked to present negative Coronavirus tests as they were travelling by car from Ashgabat to Dashoguz in July 2021. They challenged this request, demanded to see the official document based on which it was made and protested by parking their car across the road after being made to wait for hours for the document. They were then detained, with Dushemov and his friend being handed 15 days' arrest, and his friend's wife a fine. When serving this sentence, Dushemov allegedly injured two co-detainees in what is believed to have been a staged act.⁴⁴ Based on this, he was charged with deliberately harming the health of others. At the August trial, he was convicted on both this charge and the separate charge of extortion initiated against him.⁴⁵
- Lawyer **Pygambergeldy Allaberdyev** was arrested by police in the city of Balkanabad on 5 September 2020 and subsequently handed a six-year prison sentence for hooliganism and

intentionally inflicting moderate bodily harm for allegedly getting into a fight with another man, who had attacked and tried to provoke a conflict with him.⁴⁶ Rights groups believe that the lawyer was targeted because of his alleged links to members of the anti-government protest movement abroad. Following his arrest, law enforcement authorities reportedly questioned him on this issue, while rejecting his request to see medical reports of the alleged injuries he was accused of inflicting on the other man. His trial was held behind closed doors and Allaberdyev had no legal defence since several lawyers whom his family approached declined to work on the case, apparently out of fear for reprisals, while he refused the services of a government-appointed lawyer. Allaberdyev's family received no official information about the court ruling.⁴⁷ According to information from Memorial Human Rights Centre (Memorial) and the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation (THF), Allaberdyev's health has deteriorated in prison, and he has not received adequate medical assistance.⁴⁸

Given the harsh conditions within Turkmenistan's prison system, and the widespread pattern of torture and ill-treatment targeting in particular those held on politically motivated grounds (see more in the chapter on these issues), we are seriously concerned about the current situation of the individuals mentioned above. We are also concerned about the health of the following human rights activist who has been in prison for almost a decade:

- **Mansur Mingelov** was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment in an unfair trial in 2012 after exposing torture and ill-treatment of members of the ethnic Baloch minority.⁴⁹ According to information obtained by the Turkmen News in October 2021, Mingelov's health deteriorated significantly due to a serious leg inflammation and he was in urgent need of medical interventions not available at the prison in Lebap region where he is serving his sentence.⁵⁰ His family was reportedly not allowed to bring him necessary medication due to Covid-19 related restrictions on prisoners' contacts with the outside world. Mingelov's current health issues are believed to be related to beatings to which he was subjected after first being detained.⁵¹ He has also previously suffered from health problems in prison and in 2018 he was in critical condition after contracting tuberculosis and being denied adequate treatment. At that time, he was only hospitalized after his plight attracted international attention.⁵²

In addition to imprisonment on politically motivated charges, other acts of intimidation and harassment have also been reported against individuals living in Turkmenistan who have dared to publicly criticize the authorities, including **surveillance, threats against them and their relatives, and short-term detentions.**⁵³

Intimidation of activists based abroad

Turkmenistani activists based abroad have been **intimidated and harassed** because of their involvement in peaceful protests against the government's policies, their participation in the activities of exile-based opposition groups, and their social media engagement and criticism of the government.

In a growing trend, the Turkmenistani authorities have **targeted activists who live abroad through their relatives in Turkmenistan**, threatening the relatives with repercussions unless the activists stop criticizing the authorities. These are only a few examples:⁵⁴

- In March-May 2021, authorities in Turkmenistan's Lebap region carried out a campaign of intimidation against relatives of **Rozybai Jumamuradov**, a Turkey-based activist who has vocally

criticized the Turkmenistani government on social media. They summoned, questioned, and threatened the activist's 14-year-old nephew and the boy's parents with imprisonment and other serious repercussions because of their contacts with Jumamuradov.⁵⁵

- **Devlet Bayhan**, a Germany-based activist who runs a video blog critical of the Turkmenistani authorities, told TIHR that national security officials visited and threatened his relatives in the city of Mary in Turkmenistan on several occasions in spring 2021. One of his family members was warned that their son might not return alive from army service unless Bayhan quits his activism.⁵⁶
- Turkmenistan-based relatives of **Dursoltan Taganova**, an activist living in Turkey who has attracted many followers on social media (see more on her case below), have repeatedly been subjected to intimidation since she began openly criticizing the Turkmenistani government in mid-2020. Several of her relatives have been visited and questioned by law enforcement officials and her brother, Babajan Taganov was reportedly detained and severely beaten by police officers in Turkmenistan's Lepab region in July 2021 to "punish" him for his sister's criticism of the government.⁵⁷

Activists living in Turkey and Russia, which accommodate large communities of Turkmenistani migrants, are particularly vulnerable to intimidation and harassment given the friendly relations between these countries and Turkmenistan. In a number of cases, Turkmenistani activists living in these countries have been **detained by local authorities** following apparent interventions by Turkmenistani authorities (see the chapter on assembly for examples of such detentions). Some activists have also **faced the threat of deportation to Turkmenistan**, where they would be at a real risk of torture and politically motivated prosecution and imprisonment.⁵⁸

Turkey-based activist **Dursoltan Taganova** has faced this threat twice:

- Turkish police first detained Taganova together with several dozen other activists in connection with an attempted peaceful rally outside Turkmenistan's consulate in Istanbul in July 2020 (see more in the chapter on assembly). While all others were released the same day, Taganova remained in detention and was ordered to be returned to Turkmenistan for overstaying her visa.⁵⁹ As many other Turkmenistani citizens living in Turkey, Taganova has been unable to renew her passport at Turkmenistan's diplomatic representation in this country and thereby to renew her Turkish visa. However, rights groups were convinced that the real reason for her deportation order was her involvement in the protest movement against Turkmenistan's government. The Turkmenistani consulate had specifically requested her detention, falsely accusing her of interfering in the work of its diplomats and threatening them with violence.⁶⁰ Thanks to an international campaign in her support, Taganova was released after two months and granted the right to legally stay in Turkey pending the consideration of her asylum application.⁶¹ However, in spite of this, Turkish police detained her again in September 2021 and placed her in a deportation centre.⁶² This time she was released two days later after her lawyer proved her right to legally stay in Turkey.⁶³ She nevertheless remains at risk, similar to other members of the Turkmenistani protest movement in this country.

According to information received by human rights groups, the Turkmenistani authorities have allegedly handed over **a list containing the names of more than two dozen activists** to the Turkish authorities, demanding the detention and return of these activists.⁶⁴ In addition to the case of Dursoltan Taganova, several other cases in which activists have been detained and threatened by deportation from Turkey to Turkmenistan have also been reported since October 2021.⁶⁵ In another recent case, it is feared that

Turkmenistani activist **Azat Isakov** might have been forcibly returned from Russia to Turkmenistan. Although he allegedly returned voluntarily to Turkmenistan after being convicted of violating Russian migration rules in October 2021 (due to the absence of a Turkmenistani passport), there are well-founded reasons to believe that Turkmenistani authorities were involved in his return and that he is at serious risk of politically motivated imprisonment and other rights violations in Turkmenistan because of his criticism of the government on social media and threats he had previously received.⁶⁶

Other types of intimidation and harassment targeting Turkmenistani activists living abroad have also been reported.⁶⁷ For example, activists have been singled out for government-orchestrated smear campaigns denouncing them as “traitors”, they have been threatened both directly by Turkmenistani security service officials and by local officials believed to be acting on the instructions of the former, and they have been subjected to physical attacks perpetrated by unknown perpetrators in apparent retaliation for their civic engagement⁶⁸. In the following case, a blogger was ill-treated:

- In connection with a planned protest outside Turkmenistan’s consulate in Istanbul on 1 August 2021 (see the chapter on assembly), blogger **Farhad Durdyev** alleged being forcefully apprehended and taken to the consulate premises. According to him, he was arbitrarily held there for several hours, beaten, and pressured to apologize for his government-critical videos.⁶⁹ He reported the incident to Turkish police but no one is known to have been held accountable.

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani government should be requested to:

- Explain their failure to respect the rights of citizens based in- and outside the country to peacefully express their views about the situation in their country, stand up for their rights and those of fellow citizens, and engage with other like-minded individuals on issues of concern to them, including in the cases described above.
- Commit to ending the pattern of persecution of civil society members, who peacefully exercise their freedoms of expression, association and assembly to promote transparency, accountability, justice and the rule of law in Turkmenistan, as well as their relatives.
- Commit to promptly reviewing the convictions of Khursanai Ismatullaeva, Nurgeldy Khalykov, Murat Dushemov, Pygambergeldy Allaberdyev and Mansur Mingelov and to urgently releasing them on the grounds of the unfounded nature of the charges against them. Also provide an update on their current situation and the efforts made to protect their health and well-being behind bars.
- Provide information on the current status and whereabouts of Azat Isakov and provide assurances for the protection of his rights in accordance with Turkmenistan’s obligations under the ICCPR.
- Commit to refrain from seeking the detention and return to the country of activists based abroad in retaliation for their civic engagement.

Restrictions on freedom of assembly (article 21)

Restrictions on assemblies in law and practice

Turkmenistan’s Constitution safeguards the right of citizens to freedom of assembly (article 43). The Law on the Organization and Conduct of Gatherings, Meetings, Demonstrations and Other Mass Events, which entered

into force in 2015⁷⁰, allows residents and organizations to organize rallies and other assemblies if they inform the authorities in advance and agree on the venue with them. At the same time, the law **grants wide discretion to local officials to refuse to permit assemblies** on the grounds that the proposed venue is unsuitable. It also sets out that assemblies, **as a rule, should be held in venues specifically designated for this purpose** once such venues have been determined. One-person pickets can be held without informing local authorities.

In practice, **public protests are an extremely rare occurrence in Turkmenistan** because of the repressive climate in the country and the risk of persecution associated with any public criticism of the authorities. However, in some cases, residents have held **spontaneous protests to express discontent** about issues related to the protracted economic crisis in the country, as well as to demand action from the authorities. The authorities have **sought to suppress these protests** using tactics of, on the one hand, intimidation of the participants and, on the other hand, persuasion. These are only a few examples:

- In a case reported by TIHR's sources, a group of women was standing in line to buy bread at a store selling food at state subsidized prices in the Turkmenbashi district of Dashoguz region on 9 May 2020 when the government head of the district passed by on his way to inspect an agricultural complex. The women surrounded him, expressed their frustration at the shortage of flour in the district and accused him of being responsible because he had ordered vast lands previously used for wheat farming to be turned into cotton fields. After escaping from the women, the government official called the police, who arrived at the spot and briefly detained the women for questioning.⁷¹
- In another case reported by Radio *Azatlyk*, on 10 November 2020, residents of the Karakum district of Mary region staged a spontaneous protest because of the lack of flour sold at state subsidized prices. About 30 people who were standing in line at a local store to buy the promised monthly ration of flour took off to the local government administration when learning that there was not enough flour for the several hundred people wishing to buy this staple. They demanded that the authorities solve the problem with the lack of flour at state stores and grant them the flour rations to which they are entitled. A representative of the local administration came out to talk to the protesters, but after exchanging a few words with them, he called the police, who promptly arrived and dispersed the crowd.⁷²
- According to TIHR's information, in early January 2019, a group of people gathered in the city of Dashoguz to complain to the regional offices of the General Prosecutor and the Ministry of National Security regarding the introduction of strict limits on the amounts of money that the region's residents are allowed to transfer abroad. These restrictions created serious difficulties for residents wishing to transfer money to help support their children who study abroad. Officials from the approached bodies threatened the protesters with ensuring their detention, but did not follow through on their threat when the latter said that they would turn to higher-level officials. After submitting a joint written complaint to such officials, 12 people were eventually allowed to transfer additional funds to their children abroad, although the initial restrictions on monetary transfers remained in place for other residents of the region.⁷³

Interfering with the right to protest of citizens living abroad

The Turkmenistani authorities have also sought to **restrict the right to freedom of assembly of citizens outside the country**. In several cases, citizens who have gathered to peacefully protest against the government's policies abroad have been dispersed and detained by local authorities following apparent interventions by

Turkmenistani authorities. These are two cases of particular concern from Turkey, which as mentioned above accommodates a large Turkmenistani migrant community and has friendly relations with the Turkmenistani government:

- On 1 August 2021, Turkmenistani activists attempted to hold a peaceful rally outside Turkmenistan's consulate in Istanbul to protest against the government's repressive policies. However, Turkmenistani diplomats called Turkish police, who dispersed the protest participants, and detained ten activists, holding them for a few days before releasing them without charge. The police officers claimed that the protesters did not have the required permission for the protest, although they had notified local authorities in advance.⁷⁴ Human rights groups later learned that Turkmenistan's consulate had filed a complaint with Turkish police, falsely accusing the protesters of endangering the safety of its staff and "disturbing peace and tranquillity."⁷⁵ As reported by eyewitnesses, a group of young men, believed to have been engaged by Turkmenistani authorities, also arrived at the protest venue and attacked protesters, verbally assaulting them and injuring several activists.⁷⁶
- In connection with another planned peaceful protest outside Turkmenistan's consulate in Istanbul on 19 July 2020, Turkish police detained some 80 people and held them for several hours before releasing them.⁷⁷ Turkish police justified the detentions with Covid-19 related restrictions on holding assemblies, but there were reports indicating that Turkmenistani diplomats had requested the planned protest to be stopped.⁷⁸ Prior to the protest, the consulate filed a written complaint with Turkish police accusing several activists of obstructing the work of its staff and threatening them with violence – allegations which were not substantiated.⁷⁹ As covered above (see the previous chapter), one of the activists mentioned in the complaint, Dursoltan Taganova nevertheless remained in detention and was ordered deported allegedly because of a visa violation. Human rights groups also learned about several cases in which Turkmenistan-based relatives of detained protesters were subsequently subjected to intimidation.⁸⁰

Continued practice of mass mobilization of citizens

In a practice that the Human Rights Committee criticized when examining Turkmenistan's second periodic report, the Turkmenistani authorities **continue to mass mobilize public sector employees, students and other residents for participation in various state-organized events**. In violation of the right to voluntary participation in assemblies, residents are made to attend such events at **the threat of reprisals for non-participation**, such as dismissal or the loss of benefits. According to TIHR's information, when hired, employees at public institutions have even been required to sign agreements that they may be dismissed if they refuse to participate in "mass events aimed at glorifying the great achievements of the country and its leadership".⁸¹

While continuing to mobilize residents for state-organized mass events during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Turkmenistani authorities have **failed to ensure that participants comply with protective measures** such as physical distancing and the use of masks, thereby exposing them to a heightened risk of contracting Covid-19. For example, public sector employees and students mobilized to participate in official Novruz spring celebrations in the capital Ashgabat in March 2021 were taken to the venue of the celebrations on overcrowded buses without wearing masks.⁸² The authorities have also jeopardized the health and well-being of residents, including children by mobilizing them for participation in mass events in **challenging weather conditions**, such as in the following two cases:

- According to TIHR's information, on 24 June 2021, residents of the city of Farab in Lebap region were mobilized to participate in the festive opening of an amusement park, which President Berymukhamedov was expected to attend, although he eventually did not show up. The participants, dressed in national costumes were made to wait in the scorching sun for several hours before the start of the celebrations. They were not allowed to drink anything so as not to have to visit the toilet. A young girl lost consciousness due to the heat and was taken away by ambulance. The doctors attending to her at a local hospital reportedly warned her parents not to tell anyone about the incident.⁸³
- In another case reported by the Turkmen service of RFE/RL, school children and teachers were mobilized for an official event held in a park in the city of Mary on 31 May 2021 to celebrate the International Day for the Protection of Children. Despite the exceptionally hot weather (with the temperature exceeding 40 degrees Celsius), the participating children were made to wear national costumes and were not given any water to drink for several hours. A parent told Radio *Azatlyk's* correspondent that many children were crying because they were so thirsty.⁸⁴

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani authorities should be requested to:

- Provide information about the number of notifications of assemblies received/approved/rejected since the entry into force of the Law on the Organization and Conduct of Gatherings, Meetings, Demonstrations and Other Mass Events in 2015, as well as the designation and use of special venues for assemblies foreseen under this law.
- Explain how the right of residents to hold spontaneous protests is safeguarded.
- Provide assurances that the government will not interfere with the right of citizens living abroad to hold peaceful protests on issues of concern to them in their native country.
- Explain what measures have been taken to implement the Committee's previous recommendations to ensure that any restrictions on the freedom of assembly comply with the strict requirements of article 21 of the ICCPR and that participation in mass events is voluntary and that non-participation does not result in reprisals.

Restrictions on the operation of NGOs and political parties (articles 22, 19, 25)

Turkmenistan's Law on Public Associations, which was adopted in May 2014, grants citizens the right to establish and join local, regional, national and international associations of their choice and prohibits state interference in the activities of associations. However, the law also provides for **excessive restrictions on the right to freedom of association**, in particular by requiring compulsory registration of associations, establishing strict registration rules and granting authorities wide powers to oversee the activities and finances of associations without adequate safeguards against abuse. There are also broad grounds on which associations may be closed down by court.

In practice, **the operating environment for public associations remain highly restrictive** and the authorities continue to **promote so-called GONGOs** (government-organized and supported organizations) instead of real

NGOs. Among the largest public associations existing in the country are Soviet-era type of unions, such as youth and women unions, and the activities of many organizations are related to sport, health, culture and other non-controversial areas of work. Some organizations provide support to people with disabilities, elderly people and other groups in need of assistance. However, as previously, **no truly independent NGOs working on human rights** or openly challenging the government's policies **are registered or able to work openly** in the country. Civil society representatives who dare to publicly speak out on the situation in the country are highly vulnerable to persecution (see more in the chapter on civil society).

Exile-based, independent Turkmenistani NGOs have also faced pressure. For example, the website of Austria-based TIHR is regularly the target of cyberattacks, and its YouTube channel was recently blocked following copyright complaints filed by a government associated account (see more in the chapter on media control). TIHR's director Farid Tukhbatullin and his family members, including those residing in Turkmenistan have repeatedly been subjected to intimidation. Most of TIHR's contributors inside Turkmenistan work clandestinely for security reasons, while activists with a public profile who cooperate with the organization are held under surveillance and face ongoing attempts by authorities to obstruct their work.

While it remains extremely challenging for civil society actors to carry out on-the-ground monitoring of the human rights situation, **international human rights monitors have continued to be denied access** to the country. In May 2018, the Turkmenistani government issued a standing invitation to UN special procedures to visit the country.⁸⁵ However, although this was a welcome step, and there have been discussions with individual mandate holders on possible visits, the authorities have yet to finally agree to and facilitate new visits in practice.⁸⁶ The requests from a number of UN special procedures to visit Turkmenistan are currently pending, with some of these requests initially having been made over a decade ago. To date, only the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to religion or belief has visited Turkmenistan – in 2008.

Turkmenistan's Law on Political Parties, adopted in January 2012, created a legal basis for a multi-party system. It grants citizens the right to establish and participate in the activities of political parties and sets out requirements for the registration and operation of parties. The law prohibits parties established on ethnic or religious grounds, regional parties, and parties "based on professional principle". It also **requires that the leadership and management bodies of parties are located in Turkmenistan**, which rules out the possibility of parties led by citizens based in exile. Political parties may be denied registration, inter alia, if their statutes are found to violate national legislation and existing parties may be suspended or closed down by court if their activities are deemed contrary to national legislation or their own charters or programmes.

Following the adoption of the Law on Political Parties, two more political parties were established aside from the pre-existing presidential Democratic Party of Turkmenistan: The Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in 2012, and the Agrarian Party in 2014. The process of creating the two new parties was carried out under the auspices of the presidential administration and they **do not represent any independent platforms or genuine alternatives to the ruling party**. In its assessment of the March 2018 parliamentary elections, the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) concluded: "While nominally pluralist, the political landscape lacks diversity of views, as all three political parties align themselves with the President Berdymuhamedov's policies and differ only in their professed support base."⁸⁷ The ODIHR also stressed that political space "is effectively monopolized" by the current president, who has been in office since 2007 and was re-elected in 2017 for a new seven-year term.⁸⁸ Thus, as previously, there is no space for alternative political views to be openly expressed and advocated in Turkmenistan, and political opposition groups can only function outside the country.

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani authorities should be requested to:

- Elaborate on the measures taken to implement the Law on Public Associations; provide detailed information on associations that have been registered since the entry into force of the law (the number of organizations, their names and mandates); and explain how the freedom of operation of independent NGOs will be ensured in the country.
- Provide an update on the efforts made to facilitate new visits by UN special procedures to the country.
- Provide information on measures taken to comply with the Committee's recommendation to ensure that any limitations on the establishment and functioning of political parties adhere to the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality and are consistent with the relevant articles of the ICCPR, and explain how the establishment of genuine political opposition parties will be facilitated in the country.

Politically motivated imprisonment, torture, disappearances and harsh prison conditions (articles 14, 7, 9, 6, 10)

As previously, there is no effective separation of powers between different branches in Turkmenistan and the judiciary is heavily dependent on the executive. The **pattern of politically motivated prosecution and imprisonment continues**, as seen in a number of recent cases involving civil society members (see more in the chapter on civil society). Trials in politically motivated cases are typically held behind closed doors, without access to a lawyer of their own choice for the defendants and in violation of other basic fair trial guarantees.

Given the closed nature of the country's detention facilities, it is very difficult to obtain information about the problem of torture. However, available information, in particular reports from former detainees indicate that **torture and ill-treatment remain widespread**. Torture and ill-treatment are largely **perpetrated with impunity** due to the lack of effective measures to investigate allegations of such treatment and hold the perpetrators accountable, although torture is criminalized in the country. Torture and ill-treatment are believed to be frequently used in pre-trial detention facilities, with "confessions" obtained under duress routinely being used as the basis for guilty verdicts against defendants in criminal cases, but also in prisons, with individuals imprisoned on politically motivated grounds being especially vulnerable to prohibited treatment.⁸⁹

The **lack of an independent and effective monitoring mechanism** of detention facilities remains a key problem. The national bodies that currently have a mandate to monitor conditions in places of detention, including supervisory commissions attached to the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ombudsperson's office (as described in par. 85 and 94 of the State Party's report) are not independent and, judging from the information provided by the government, only occasionally carry out visits to detention facilities. The authorities have **not allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to monitor the country's detention facilities** and although sporadic visits by foreign diplomats and representatives of international organizations to such facilities (as described in par. 96 of the State Party's report) are welcome, they cannot replace regular, unhindered independent monitoring.

There have also been **new reports about hazing and torture in the army**, and TIHR and other independent organizations have received information about several cases in which **soldiers have died under circumstances suggesting that this has been the result of abusive treatment** to which they have been subjected by army officials and fellow conscripts.⁹⁰ There have typically been no effective investigations into these cases.

The **practice of enforced disappearances also continues** in Turkmenistan. While the government claims to have received no complaints about enforced disappearances (par. 77 of the State Party's report), independent civil society organizations have received information about dozens of such cases. The Prove They Are Alive NGO campaign has documented over 160 cases of enforced disappearances since 2002 involving individuals convicted in relation to the alleged assassination attempt on late President Saparmurat Niyazov, former state officials prosecuted after falling out of favour with the government, people charged with so-called Islamic extremism and civil society activists.⁹¹ Some of the victims are known to subsequently have died, been released or granted contacts with their family, but at least 72 cases are ongoing.⁹²

While the material conditions within parts of Turkmenistan's prison system have improved as a result of the modernization efforts undertaken by the authorities in the past decade (as described in par. 90 of the State Party's report), **serious concerns remain about prison conditions**. As documented in a joint report published by TIHR and Turkmenistan's Independent Lawyers Association (TILA),⁹³ major problems include overcrowding, poor sanitation, scant access to food and drinking water, widespread diseases such as tuberculosis, and lack of adequate medical assistance. Corrupt practices among prison staff also negatively affect the situation of prisoners.

Given the government's policy of denial in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic (see more in the chapter on this issue), there is **no official information about the spread of Covid-19 in prisons**. However, exile-based NGOs have received information about cases of Covid-19 among prisoners and recently released prisoners.⁹⁴ Against the background of the problems within the prison system described above, prisoners are clearly at heightened risk of Covid-19.⁹⁵ In the context of the pandemic, **new restrictions have been enforced on prisoners' contacts with their relatives**, including meetings and receiving parcels with food and other necessities.⁹⁶ While introduced for public health reasons, these measures have further increased the vulnerability of prisoners. As previously, there are particular concerns about the treatment of prisoners held at the **notorious Ovadan Depe facility**, where conditions have been described as terrifying by previous prisoners.⁹⁷ Many individuals imprisoned on politically motivated grounds have been taken to Ovadan Depe and this secretive facility is also believed to accommodate many of those who have disappeared within the prison system.

Recommended questions

The Turkmenistani government should be requested to:

- Explain the progress made on the implementation of the national policy framework for 2017-2021 adopted with a view to improving the administration of justice and ensuring judicial independence (as mentioned in par. 112 of the State Party's report), in particular with respect to revising the procedure for the appointment of judges.
- Provide information about the number of complaints about torture received from detainees, as well as their relatives and legal representatives since the review of the State Party's second periodic report; the number of investigations opened into such allegations; and the number of charges initiated and the verdicts handed down in these cases. Also elaborate on how material from video surveillance

equipment installed in places of detention has been used in investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

- Provide information about cases of deaths of soldiers during service since the review of the State Party's second periodic report, including the number, date and nature of these cases, and the investigations undertaken into each case.
- Undertake to investigate all cases of enforced disappearances documented by independent NGOs; to provide information about the fate and current whereabouts of the persons concerned; and to grant them access to their family and lawyers.
- Explain any progress made with respect to granting the ICRC access to places of detention for conducting monitoring in accordance with its standard procedures; elaborate on the opportunities of civil society organizations to visit detention facilities (par. 93 of the State Party's report); and list any organizations that have been allowed to carry out such visits, specifying which facilities they have visited and when.
- Provide an update on the reported plans to increase the state budget for improving the conditions of detention, food and medical care for persons serving their sentences (par. 90 of the State Party's report).
- Explain the measures taken to protect prisoners against Covid-19, but also to limit the negative impact of additional restrictions on prisoners' contacts their with relatives enforced in the context of the pandemic.

The use of forced labour in the cotton harvest (article 8)

As documented in a joint report published by TIHR and Turkmen News in March 2021⁹⁸, the Turkmenistani authorities **continue to systematically use forced labour to harvest cotton**, in violation of both national and international law. Based on monitoring of the 2020 cotton harvest in four of Turkmenistan's five regions, the report found that public sector employees and university and college students were forced to pick cotton, or hire someone else in their place to do so, at the threat of dismissal (in the case of employees) or disciplinary penalties or expulsion from their institutions (in the case of students).

As **women** make up a majority of those working in the public sector, they **are particularly vulnerable** to this practice. The use of forced labour in the cotton fields also has a **debilitating impact on the provision of education, health, and other basic public services** as teachers, doctors and other public employees spend time picking cotton instead of carrying out their regular work.⁹⁹

While the authorities have enforced Covid-19 preventive measures in other contexts, they failed to do so in relation to those participating in the 2020 cotton harvest, thereby **exposing them to an increased risk of contracting the Coronavirus**. In particular, public sector employees were taken to pick cotton on overcrowded buses without wearing masks, and access to hygiene facilities was not provided in the cotton fields.¹⁰⁰

In another ongoing practice documented in the joint NGO monitoring report, **public sector employees are required to pay a supposedly voluntary contribution** from their salaries to cover costs related to the cotton harvest and thereby ensure the "the successful implementation of the state plan" in this area. Such

requirements **negatively affect the well-being of entire families** as many families are struggling to make ends meet amid the protracted economic crisis and rising food prices.¹⁰¹

Recommended question

The Turkmenistani authorities should be requested to:

- In view of the documented, continued use of forced labour in the cotton harvest, explain their failure to comply with the Committee's previous recommendations in this regard and ensure that national legislation and international standards banning forced labour are implemented in practice.

¹ See more in TIHR report from 3 May 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/05/treating-symptoms/>

² See more in TIHR reports from 4 May and 7 May 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/05/lebap-mayday/>; <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/05/arrests/>

³ The government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was examined in detail in a report published by IPHR and TIHR in July 2020: <https://www.iphronline.org/it-came-with-the-wind-turkmenistan-s-covid-19-response.html>

⁴ See <https://covid19.who.int/table>

⁵ More details can be found in IPHR-TIHR report from July 2020: <https://www.iphronline.org/it-came-with-the-wind-turkmenistan-s-covid-19-response.html>

⁶ Examples of such cases are documented in the following TIHR report from April 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/04/mobile/>; and the following Radio *Azatlyk* report from 5 March 2021: <https://www.azathabar.com/a/31135145.html>

⁷ For example, after more than 100 medical workers in Turkmenabat appealed to the regional authorities in July 2020 to provide hospitals with more means of personal protection, medicine and equipment, they were warned that the appeal was "contradictory to the president's policies" and that they might be held accountable. See TIHR report from 4 August 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/medics-demands/>

⁸ See more in IPHR-TIHR report from July 2020: <https://www.iphronline.org/it-came-with-the-wind-turkmenistan-s-covid-19-response.html>; and joint letter to the WHO by Turkmenistani human rights groups in exile from September 2021: <https://en.turkmen.news/news/open-letter-to-world-health-organization/>

⁹ The findings of the WHO mission are summarized in the following press release from 15 July 2020: <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2020/07/1382091>

¹⁰ BBC, "WHO casts doubt on Turkmenistan's zero-Covid claim", 8 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59168540>

¹¹ On 7 August 2020, WHO's Europe regional director reported that the Turkmenistani government had agreed to such an arrangement: https://twitter.com/hans_kluge/status/1291758100479967234?lang=en

¹² See, for example, the following TIHR reports from 3 August 2020 and 21 July 2020: <https://en.hronikatm.com/2020/08/the-bodies-of-those-who-have-died-of-pneumonia-are-handed-over-in-plastic-bags-and-relatives-are-requested-to-bury-them-without-unpacking/>; <https://en.hronikatm.com/2020/07/at-least-8-to-12-people-die-of-pneumonia-in-ashgabat-on-a-daily-basis/>

¹³ Available in Russian at: http://base.spininform.ru/show_doc.fwx?rgn=57214

¹⁴ See <https://rsf.org/en/Turkmenistan>

¹⁵ See, for example, the following report from a government meeting in February 2021: <https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/ru/post/52315/prezident-turkmenistana-provyol-soveshchanie-po-sovershenstvovaniyu-sfery-kultury-i-smi>

¹⁶ See Point 46, in the first part of section II in the National Human Rights Action Plan for 2016-2020.

¹⁷ <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index>

¹⁸ <https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/speed/worldwide-speed-league/>

¹⁹ The current rates are quoted at: <https://telecom.tm/ru/internet>

²⁰ See <https://turkmenportal.com/blog/31110/v-turkmenistane-s-1-yanvary-2021-goda-povyshat-zarabotnyuyu-platu-pensii-gosudarstvennye-posobiya-i-stipendii>

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- ²¹ See <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-turkmenistan>
- ²² The report is available at: <https://www.qurium.org/alerts/turkmenistan/turkmenistan-and-their-golden-dpi/>
- ²³ See more in the following IPHR-TIHR update from May 2021: https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-dec_20_mar_21.html
- ²⁴ Radio *Azattyk* report from 14 December 2020: <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30999952.html>
- ²⁵ See Radio Svoboda, “В Ашхабаде несколько десятков человек арестованы на 15 суток за настройку VPN на телефонах”, 21 August 2021: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30795817.html>; Human Rights Watch, chapter on Turkmenistan in 2021 World Report: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/turkmenistan>
- ²⁶ RFE/RL, “VPNs Are Not A-OK: Turkmen Internet Users Forced To Swear On Koran They Won't Use Them”, 10 August 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-vpn-koran-ban/31402718.html>
- ²⁷ For an example, see TIHR report from 15 May 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/05/under-attack/>
- ²⁸ For more information, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>; and IPHR-TIHR update from October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ²⁹ Eurasianet weekly update, 13 October 2021: “YouTube censors Eurasianet at Turkmenistan’s behest”; RFE/RL: “YouTube Blocks Channel Of U.S. News Group After Complaints From Turkmen State Media”, 13 October 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-youtube-blocked-eurasianet/31507692.html>
- ³⁰ TIHR report from 26 April 2018: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2018/04/antennyi-srezayut-shhepki-letyat-v-turkmenbashi-vozobnovili-demontazh-sputnikoviyh-antenn/>
- ³¹ Radio *Azattyk* report from 28 June 2018: <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/29325746.html>
- ³² See more in TIHR report from 2 June 2017: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2017/06/iz-setki-veshaniya-iptv-v-turkmenistane-propal-ryad-rossijskih-kanalov/>
- ³³ For more information about this trend, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>
- ³⁴ See more about her case in joint letter by six human rights groups issued in November 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ENG-open-letter-Hursanai-Ismatullaeva-23-Nov-2021.pdf>; and the following Turkmen News reports from 17 July 2021 and 16 November 2020: <https://turkmen.news/ismatullaeva-urgent/>, <https://turkmen.news/turkmen-doctor-seeks-justice/>
- ³⁵ Turkmen News release from 28 July 2021: <https://turkmen.news/human-rights/ismatullaeva-faces-fraud-charge/>
- ³⁶ See more in joint letter by six human rights groups issued in November 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ENG-open-letter-Hursanai-Ismatullaeva-23-Nov-2021.pdf>
- ³⁷ For more information about his case, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>
- ³⁸ See Turkmen News release from 13 February 2021: <https://turkmen.news/human-rights/predstavitel-obse-po-svobode-smi-na-vstreche-s-poslom-turkmenistana-zaprosila-informatsiyu-o-dele-nurgeldy-halykova/>
- ³⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), “Journalist Nurgeldi Halykov jailed in Turkmenistan since September 2020 on fraud charges”, 21 May 2021, at <https://cpj.org/2021/05/journalist-nurgeldi-halykov-jailed-in-turkmenistan-since-september-2020-on-fraud-charges/>
- ⁴⁰ See communication from UN special mandates to Turkmenistan’s government dated 17 February 2021: <https://turkmen.news/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Communication-to-Turkmenistan.pdf>
- ⁴¹ For a more detailed description of this case, see IPHR-TIHR update from October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ⁴² Radio *Azattyk* article published on 26 June 2021: <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31327487.html>
- ⁴³ TIHR news release from 18 August 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/08/four-years-in-prison/>
- ⁴⁴ Turkmen News report from 22 July 2021: <https://turkmen.news/human-rights/dushemov-facing-jail/>
- ⁴⁵ For more information, see IPHR-TIHR update from October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ⁴⁶ See TIHR reports from 7 September 2020 and 30 September 2020 based on information from Memorial and the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation (THF): <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/09/another-arrest/> and <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/09/6-year-sentence/>
- ⁴⁷ Joint statement issued by 10 human rights NGOs on 22 October 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/22/turkmenistan-drop-charges-free-wrongfully-imprisoned-lawyer>
- ⁴⁸ Memorial and THF report from 15 February 2021: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/politzaklyuchyonnyh-v-turkmenistane-ogranichivayut-v-kontaktah-s-rodstvennikami
- ⁴⁹ For additional background information on his case, see Amnesty International Urgent Action from 13 June 2014: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/eur610042014en.pdf>
- ⁵⁰ See Turkmen News article from 4 October 2021: <https://turkmen.news/banner/mingelov-prison-health/>
- ⁵¹ See the previous note.

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- ⁵² See Amnesty International, "Release critically ill human rights defender: Mansur Mingelov", 12 July 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR6187832018ENGLISH.pdf>
- ⁵³ For a number of examples, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>
- ⁵⁴ Additional examples can be found in IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>; and the following TIHR-IPHR update published in October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ⁵⁵ See more in joint statement issued by TIHR, IPHR, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in May 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-threats-against-relatives-of-dissidents-abroad.html>
- ⁵⁶ See the previous note.
- ⁵⁷ See more in the following joint statement by IPHR, TIHR and other organizations from 25 June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/torture-final-25.06.pdf>
- ⁵⁸ For additional examples, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>
- ⁵⁹ TIHR report from 10 August 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/dursoltan/>
- ⁶⁰ Joint statement by human rights defenders issued on 23 July 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/07/prekratit-presledovaniya-turkmenskih-grazhdanskih-aktivistov/>
- ⁶¹ For more information, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>
- ⁶² Memorial news release from 27 September 2021: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/turkmenskuyu-aktivistku-dursoltan-taganovu-zaderzhali-v-stambule-i-napravili-v
- ⁶³ TIHR news release from 29 September 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/09/taganova-released/>
- ⁶⁴ TIHR news release from 19 October 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/10/2-activists-detained/>
- ⁶⁵ For more examples, see joint NGO statement issued on 2 November 2021: <http://www.tmhelsinki.org/en/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3531>
- ⁶⁶ For more information on his case, see TIHR report from 10 November 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/11/isakov-deported/>; comment by Memorial and THF from 10 November 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/11/new-rules-for-oppositioners/>; and TIHR report from 14 August 2020 based on information from Memorial and THF: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/repressions-2/>
- ⁶⁷ For more information, see IPHR-TIHR report issued in June 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CLOSED-CIVIC-SPACE-IN-TURKMENISTAN-JUNE-2021-1.pdf>; and IPHR-TIHR update from 5 October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ⁶⁸ For an example of such an attack, see TIHR report based on information from Memorial and THF from 12 October 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/10/activists-beaten/>
- ⁶⁹ For more information, see IPHR-TIHR update from October 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>
- ⁷⁰ Available (in Russian) at: https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/9597/file/TURKM_on%20freedom%20of%20assembly_ru.pdf
- ⁷¹ TIHR report from 10 May 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/05/spontaneous-protest/>
- ⁷² Radio *Azattyk* report from 10 November 2020: <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30940827.html>
- ⁷³ TIHR reports from 6 February 2019 and 10 January 2019: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/02/roditelyam-studentov-napisavshim-kollektivnyuyu-zhalobu-na-western-union-pozvolili-perevesti-dopolnitelnye-summy/>, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/01/zhiteli-turkmenistana-stali-vyirazhat-nedovolstvo-v-svyazi-s-vvedennyimi-ogranicheniyami-po-perevodam-deneg-za-rubezh/>
- ⁷⁴ TIHR reports from 3 August 2021 and 5 August 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/08/protestors-arrested/>, and <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/08/tk-internal-affairs/>
- ⁷⁵ See Memorial news release from 3 September 2021: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/v-aeroportu-stambula-zaderzhali-priletevshego-iz-francii-rukovoditelya-oppozitsionnogo
- ⁷⁶ See more in YouTube report published on 1 August 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nhpp27hpDmg&ab_channel=MuradKurbanov
- ⁷⁷ For more information on this incident, see TIHR report from 16 August 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/interview/>
- ⁷⁸ TIHR report from 10 August 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/dursoltan/>
- ⁷⁹ See joint statement by human rights defenders from 23 July 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/07/prekratit-presledovaniya-turkmenskih-grazhdanskih-aktivistov/>
- ⁸⁰ TIHR report from 16 August 2020: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/interview/>; and TIHR report from and 14 August 2020 based on information from Memorial and THF: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/repressions-2/>
- ⁸¹ TIHR report from 19 October 2019: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/10/pay-to-work/>

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- ⁸² TIHR report from 22 March 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/03/nowruz-festivities/>
- ⁸³ TIHR report from 28 June 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/06/inappropriately-dressed/>
- ⁸⁴ Radio *Azattyk* report from 2 June 2021: <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31285959.html>
- ⁸⁵ According to information available at: <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/StandingInvitations.aspx?lang=en>
- ⁸⁶ For more information on this issue, see joint TIHR-IPHR letter from February 2021: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ENG-Final-joint-letter-on-Turkmenistan-Febr-2021.pdf>
- ⁸⁷ Final report by OSCE ODIHR election assessment mission on parliamentary elections held on 25 March 2018: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/8/382915_0.pdf
- ⁸⁸ See the previous note.
- ⁸⁹ TIHR-TILA report, *Turkmenistan's penitentiary system*, December 2017, available in Russian at: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2017/12/penitentsiarnyie-uchrezhdeniya-turkmenistana-doklad-tipch/>
- ⁹⁰ For example, according to TIHR's information, in September 2019, four conscript soldiers allegedly died as a result of hazing at a military unit in Lepab region. The mother of one of them organized for an autopsy, which showed that her son died due to a head injury and had numerous traces of beatings on his body. In another case reported by Turkmen News, a soldier died in December 2019 after a month's service in Mary region. The official reason for his death was meningitis of unknown origin, but his relatives did not believe this version as he was hospitalized with signs of having been severely beaten. See TIHR report from 17 September 2019: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/09/army-hazing-2/>; and Turkmen News report from 26 May 2020: <https://turkmen.news/turkmenskaya-armiya-ubivaet/>. Additional examples of deaths in the army can be found in the following TIHR reports from 8 July 2020 and 29 August 2019: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/07/army-hazing-3/>; <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/08/army-hazing/>
- ⁹¹ Prove They Are Alive, "List of the Disappeared in Turkmenistan's Prisons", November 2021: https://provetheyarealive.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Disappeared-in-Turkmenistans-prisons_report_Prove_November-2021_final.pdf
- ⁹² See the previous note.
- ⁹³ TIHR-TILA report, *Turkmenistan's Penitentiary System*, December 2017, available in Russian at: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2017/12/penitentsiarnyie-uchrezhdeniya-turkmenistana-doklad-tipch/>
- ⁹⁴ See, for example, TIHR report from 30 September 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/09/pardoned-covid/>
- ⁹⁵ See more in IPHR-TIHR report published in July 2020: <https://www.iphronline.org/it-came-with-the-wind-turkmenistan-s-covid-19-response.html>
- ⁹⁶ See more on these restrictions in report by Memorial and THF from 15 February 2021: https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/politzaklyuchyonnyh-v-turkmenistane-ogranichivayut-v-kontaktah-s-rodstvennikami; TIHR report from 26 July 2021: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/07/no-visits/>; and Turkmen News report from 27 August 2021: <https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-itk-peredachi/>
- ⁹⁷ See TIHR-TILA report from December 2017: <https://www.hronikatm.com/2017/12/penitentsiarnyie-uchrezhdeniya-turkmenistana-doklad-tipch/>; and also Prove They Are Alive Report, *Turkmenistan's Prison System and Political Prisoners*, February 2020: https://provetheyarealive.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/TKM-prison-system_briefing-paper_Prove-campaign_Feb-2020.pdf
- ⁹⁸ TIHR and Turkmen News, *Review of the Use of Forced Labor in Turkmenistan during the 2020 Cotton Harvest*: https://en.turkmen.news/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TURKMENISTAN_COTTON_2020_WEB_ENG.pdf
- ⁹⁹ See the previous note.
- ¹⁰⁰ See the previous note.
- ¹⁰¹ See the previous note.