



Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Turkmenistan of the USC Human Rights Advocacy Group and Freedom for Eurasia

April 2023

Introduction

1. This memorandum jointly submitted on behalf of the University of Southern California Human Rights Advocacy Group (USC HRAG) and Freedom for Eurasia summarizes concerns regarding Turkmenistan's human rights record in advance of its upcoming Universal Periodic Review. In particular, the submission focuses on human rights violations and transnational repression faced by Turkmenistan citizens, including migrant workers and human rights activists, living in Turkiye (Turkey), an important center of Turkmenistan's diaspora. This memorandum details the surveillance, travel restrictions, discrimination and other abuses that Ashgabat and Ankara have increasingly used to control and monitor Turkmens abroad and their relatives who remain in the country. This submission is also based on substantial support, guidance, and critical input from the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF).

Turkmens Living Abroad

2. In 2007, the governments of Turkey and Turkmenistan established a system whereby Turkmenistan citizens could legally reside in Turkey for up to thirty days without a tourist visa, which over time evolved to allow them to reside in Turkey continuously without a visa. Despite the Turkish government's long-stated policy of easing travel restrictions for citizens of fellow Turkic-speaking nations, including four Central Asian states, the immediate effect of these restrictions was to disenfranchise and discriminate against Turkmenistan citizens, including by revoking rights hundreds of thousands had previously enjoyed living in Turkey.

3. On May 31, 2022, media reported that Turkmen authorities initiated talks with Ankara to abolish this agreement, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of Turkmen living illegally in Turkey with no clear legal pathway to legal residency. Turkey's State Migration Service reported that as of September 1, 2022, there were approximately 230,000 Turkmen citizens living legally in Turkey, but unofficial estimates place the number much higher.¹
4. In September 2022, the Turkmenistan government officially requested that Turkey impose visa restrictions on Turkmen citizens.² On September 13, 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed the decree into law which states that Turkmen citizens are no longer eligible to reside in Turkey absent a visa.³ Following this, hundreds of thousands of Turkmen found themselves living illegally and undocumented in Turkey.
5. As this submission outlines, Turkmen activists and rights defenders in Turkey face an increasingly unsafe environment due to their peaceful human rights work. Turkmen officials and security services engage in widespread surveillance, harassment, and abuses against activists and perceived government critics in Turkey. In some cases, Turkish authorities have been complicit in or turned a blind eye to these abuses, including by violating the principle of *non-refoulement*, e.g., the obligation not to return an individual to a country where there is a substantial likelihood she could be subjected to torture or ill-treatment, in addition to enforced disappearances and politically-motivated imprisonment.

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement and Passports

6. Over the past five years, Turkmenistan has implemented significant restrictions on the freedom of movement of its citizens and its police and security services have placed wide-ranging restrictions on the issuance of passports and other legal documents.
7. Previously Turkmen authorities issued and exchanged passports through consular offices abroad, but in recent years have stopped this practice altogether. There has also been a marked increase in the use of transnational repression to persecute, silence or forcibly

¹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Turkey Cancels Visa-Free Travel For Turkmen Citizens At Ashgabat's Request' <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-cancels-visa-free-travel-turkmen-citizens/32033622.html> (14 September 2022) <<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2078802.html>> accessed 18 February 2023.

² Levent Kenez, 'Erdogan Gov't Lifted Visa Exemption at Turkmenistan's Request, Preventing Turkmen Dissidents from Leaving the Country - Nordic Monitor' (15 September 2022) <<https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/09/erdogan-government-lifted-visa-exemption-at-turkmenistans-request-preventing-turkmen-dissidents-from-leaving-the-country/>> accessed 18 February 2023.

³ RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, 'Turkish President Cancels Visa-Free Regime with Turkmenistan' (*RFE/RL*, 14 September 2022) <<https://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-cancels-visa-free-travel-turkmen-citizens/32033622.html>> accessed 18 February 2023; Human Rights Watch, 'Turkmenistan: Events of 2021', *World Report 2022* (2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkmenistan>> accessed 18 February 2023; Liberty (n 1).

return perceived critics who live abroad.⁴ In addition, authorities used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to largely stop flights in and out of Turkmenistan.

8. While some flights have since resumed, travel routes and the ability to freely leave the country have drastically diminished, placing Turkmen citizens who wish to pursue economic opportunity or greater political freedom abroad in an increasingly difficult predicament, rendering them *de facto* hostages in their own country.⁵
9. In July 2021, Turkmen authorities approved a procedure to extend the validity of biometric passports of citizens of Turkmenistan in embassies abroad.⁶ However, in doing so, Turkmenistan restricted the freedom of movement of its citizens by refusing to extend traditional passports and or issue stamps that serve as passport extensions.⁷ Turkmen embassies are not obliged not to extend the validity of passports that expire, but to issue new ones to their citizens.⁸ The insert that extends the validity of Turkmen passports is not recognized as valid in third countries. Furthermore, Turkmen citizens issued a passport to live in Turkey legally cannot use these documents to travel elsewhere, requiring them to return to Turkmenistan.⁹

Legal Standards

10. Turkmenistan's Constitution, specifically Article 25, recognizes the freedoms and norms guaranteed by international law, and mandates the granting of these liberties to all citizens.¹⁰ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Turkmenistan is a signatory, protects the freedom of expression, including for human rights defenders, through Articles 19, 21, and 22.¹¹ Article 19 of the ICCPR upholds the fundamental right to free expression, while Article 21 recognizes the right to peaceful

⁴ Хроника Туркменистана, 'Туркменские Загранпаспорта Будут Продлевать в Зарубежных Консульствах [Turkmen Passports Will Be Renewed at Foreign Consulates]' *Хроника Туркменистана* (28 July 2021) <<https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/07/passport-extension/>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁵ 'Ashgabat Exodus: Turkmen Seek Passports To Leave Poverty-Stricken Country' *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (11:49:22Z) <<https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenstan-mass-exodus-passports-poverty/32262495.html>> accessed 18 February 2023; Riley Pickett, 'Turkmenistan Airlines Resumes Regular Flights To Russia's Kazan Airport From Ashgabat' (4 February 2023) <<https://simpleflying.com/turkmenistan-airlines-flights-russia-kazan-airport/>> accessed 18 February 2023; Turkmen Portal, 'Tickets for Flights Cancelled during the Pandemic by "Turkmen Airlines" Will Be Reissued until February 28 | Tourism' (16 January 2023) <<https://turkmenportal.com/en/blog/56797/tickets-for-flights-cancelled-during-the-pandemic-by-turkmen-airlines-will-be-reissued-until-february-28>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁶ Хроника Туркменистана (n 4).

⁷ Information available upon request.

⁸ Хроника Туркменистана, 'Турция Отказывает в ВНЖ Туркменистанцам с Продленными Паспортами [Türkiye Denies Residence Permits to Citizens of Turkmenistan with Renewed Passports]' <<https://www.hronikatm.com/2023/03/extended-passports-not-recognized/>> accessed 2 April 2023.

⁹ Information available upon request.; Хроника Туркменистана (n 8).

¹⁰ Constitution of Turkmenistan 1992, as amended to 2016.

¹¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | OHCHR 1966.

¹² *Ibid.*

assembly.¹² Article 22 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of association.¹³ Furthermore, Article 12 of the ICCPR guarantees freedom of movement to all individuals, both within their country of origin and abroad.¹⁴ Article 19 of the ICCPR ensures that individuals have the right to hold opinions and express them freely, without any interference.¹⁵ This includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any medium, without regard to national boundaries. Any restrictions on this right must be in accordance with the law, and only when necessary to protect the rights and reputations of others or for reasons of national security, public order, or public health.¹⁶

11. The right to peaceful assembly, as guaranteed by Article 21 of the ICCPR, is recognized as a fundamental right.¹⁷ Any restrictions placed on this right must be in conformity with the law, necessary for a democratic society, and in the interests of national security, public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.¹⁸
12. Article 22 of the ICCPR recognizes the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of one's interests.¹⁹ The exercise of this right may only be restricted by law when necessary for a democratic society and in the interests of national security, public safety, public order, the protection of public health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.²⁰
13. As Turkmenistan is a signatory to the ICCPR, it is bound to uphold these rights and protections for all its citizens.²¹ As this submission details, there are numerous reported cases of violations of these rights, particularly with regards to the freedom of expression and association, as well as freedom of movement.

Turkmens Residing in Turkey

14. The quality of life of Turkmens living in Turkey is hindered by several obstacles, including severe difficulties obtaining visas and increased scrutiny from the Turkmenistan government towards its citizens who have emigrated in search of employment.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 'United Nations Treaty Collection'

<https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_en> accessed 18 February 2023.

15. Turkmen citizens who seek to stay in Turkey face serious difficulty obtaining passport renewals. In one case, a female Turkmen migrant residing in Turkey became an undocumented migrant due to the Turkmen authorities' refusal to renew her passport.²² In January 2023, Turkish police detained and sent her to a deportation center with her one-year-old daughter, as her husband was unable to retain custody of their child.²³ Only following the intervention of human rights activists, the Turkmen migrant issued a power of attorney to a relative who took custody of her child.²⁴ Turkmen women, in particular, often travel to Turkey seeking work as a result of profound disenfranchisement and barriers to obtaining employment in Turkmenistan, but face difficulties in obtaining passports in foreign consulates.²⁵

Civil Society Activists in Turkey Harassed, Monitored and Intimidated

16. Turkish police have reportedly compiled a list of 25 Turkmen migrants subject to deportation, as directed by the Turkmen consulate.²⁶ Neither the detained activists nor Turkish lawyers representing them have been allowed to see the list or learn the legal basis for their detention.

17. On March 11, 2022, Turkmen activist Aziz Mamedov's Istanbul apartment was raided by armed police officers.²⁷ Mamedov had earlier found a large basket of roses and an envelope with his name, as well as the names of two other participants in the protest movement, in front of his apartment door.²⁸ A letter accompanying the gift, which was from an anonymous Turkish citizen claiming to have two companies working in Ashgabat, stated the author's intention to provide financial and moral support to the critics of the Turkmen regime.²⁹ The author also included a WhatsApp number for contact that would be activated between midnight and 1:30 am. However, upon inspection, Mamedov found a package containing light gray powder, metal balls, an oily

²² Information available upon request.

²³ Information available upon request.

²⁴ Information available upon request.

²⁵ For instance, Gulya Dzhumayeva, a Turkmen citizen from Turkmenabat, arrived in Turkey in March 2015 to seek work due to her family's financial difficulties. However, Dzhumayeva encountered numerous challenges, including harassment from employers, difficulty finding employment that paid a salary, and being taken advantage of by employers. After some time in Turkey, she met a man who proposed, and she accepted, citing her desire for citizenship as one of the reasons. However, her husband turned out to be abusive and uncooperative when she was ready to apply for citizenship, forcing her to leave him without pursuing legal action, and ultimately failing to obtain citizenship.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, 'Pressure on Turkmen Nationals in Turkey Must Be Stopped.' (*Human Rights Watch*, 2 November 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/02/pressure-turkmen-nationals-turkey-must-be-stopped>> accessed 18 February 2023.

²⁷ Radio Azatlyk, "‘Цветы’ и мертвая кошка для активиста. К туркменскому активисту в Стамбуле ворвались полицейские [‘Flowers’ and a dead cat for an activist. Turkmen activist in Istanbul rushed by police]" *Радио Азатлык* (12 March 2022) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31749643.html>> accessed 19 February 2023.

²⁸ Ibid.; Information available upon request.

²⁹ Ibid.; Information available upon request.

liquid, wires, and a Samsung phone battery at the bottom of the basket of roses.³⁰

18. The Turkmen activist's fears were proven legitimate when, at 00:14, a group of police officers, including four machine gunners wearing helmets, burst into Mamedov's apartment, pulled him out, and examined his phone.³¹ Mamedov told the police officers about the events preceding the raid. According to Mamedov, the letter he received was not written by a Turkmen but by a Turk, as evidenced by its style.³²
19. Mamedov's case is part of a larger trend of transnational surveillance and harassment directed at Turkmen nationals who express their peaceful opposition views in Turkey.

Omruzak Omarkuliev

20. Omruzak Omarkuliev, a Turkmen student studying in Turkey, was lured back to Turkmenistan by the government in early 2018, under the pretext of participating in parliamentary elections as an observer. Omarkuliev had founded the "Society of Solidarity of Turkmen Students," an organization that provided a space for Turkmen students studying in Turkey to connect, but which caught the attention of the Turkmen embassy.³³ Omarkuliev was invited to return to Turkmenistan, explaining the reasoning for his trip being "to meet with Deputies of Turkmenistan's Mejlis, Central People's Council, Regional People's Council, and members of local councils ahead of March 25 elections, and organize the participation of Turkmen students in Turkey in the elections at voting stations in Turkey."³⁴ On February 14, 2018, Omarkuliev returned to Turkmenistan to participate in the promised events alongside Azat Dzhapparov: a man pretending to be a student and representative of Turkmen students at the Turkmen consulate.³⁵ Dzhapparov was a close associate of the Ministry of National Security of Turkmenistan. However, after returning, Omarkuliev was prevented from leaving the country and slept at the airport for ten days until he disappeared; he is believed to have been detained at this point.³⁶
21. Little is known about what happened to Omarkuliev in prison until September 2019, when he resurfaced in a YouTube video by Dovletmurat Yazkuliev, a well-known state-controlled journalist who commonly makes pro-government videos while claiming to be independent.³⁷ The video aimed to prove Turkmenistan's claims that Omarkuliev is alive,

³⁰ Ibid.; Information available upon request.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.; Information available upon request.

³³ Information available upon request.

³⁴ Information available upon request.

³⁵ Turkmen News, 'Фотография: Студент Омрузак Умаркулиев Летит в Туркменистан. Его Заманили Туда Обманным Путем, а Затем Осудили На Длительный Срок [Photo: Student Omruzak Umarduliev Flies to Turkmenistan. He Was Fraudulently Lured There and Then Sentenced to a Lengthy Term.]' *Turkmen News* (19 June 2019) <<https://turkmen.news/omruzak-umarkuliev/>> accessed 29 March 2023.

³⁶ Information available upon request.

³⁷ 'Появилось сомнительное видео с Омрузаком Умаркулиевым, считающимся без вести пропавшим в туркменской тюрьме [Dubious video of Omruzak Umarduliyev, considered missing in Turkmen prison, emerges]' *Радио Азатлык* (20 September 2019) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30175359.html>> accessed 29 March 2023.

and Omruzak Omarkuliev was in the army.³⁸ However, discrepancies in the video suggest that it was fabricated, and Omarkuliev's whereabouts and condition remain unknown.³⁹ In March 2023, Turkmen representatives at the 137th session of the UN Committee on Human Rights in Geneva claimed that Omarkuliev now resides at home in Turkmenistan; however, due to the lack of evidence corroborating this statement, Omarkuliev's status remains unknown.⁴⁰

Tadjigul Begmedova

22. Tadjigul Begmedova is a Turkmen national who worked as an associate professor at the Institute of National Economy in Ashgabat for 20 years, where she was also involved in social work.⁴¹ Begmedova left in 2002 due to rising levels of repression under Turkmenistan's first and long-standing autocratic president Saparmyrat Niyazov, who gained notoriety for his bizarre cult of personality, including, among other policies, mandating every citizen read his book, the *Ruhnama*, and exalting himself as a god-like figure.⁴²
23. After Begmedova left Turkmenistan for Bulgaria in March 2002, Turkmenistan requested Bulgaria to extradite Begmedova and her husband, advancing trumped-up allegations that she was involved in the theft of a bank in Turkmenistan in the summer of 2002, which happened after she had left the country.⁴³ Bulgaria refused Ashgabat's extradition request on grounds of political persecution and a lack of evidence.⁴⁴ Turkmenistan, in response, detained five of Begmedova's relatives, fabricated criminal cases against them, and sentenced them to 6 to 8 years in prison.⁴⁵
24. In 2003, Begmedova founded the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF) in Bulgaria, which aims to monitor Turkmenistan's human rights situation and the rights of Turkmen citizens abroad.⁴⁶ THF provides legal assistance and publishes reports on human rights abuses in Turkmenistan and has played a significant role in securing the release of Turkmen nationals unjustly detained both inside the country and in Turkey.⁴⁷ For instance, THF played a critical role in the release of Dursoltan Taganova and other Turkmen activists in Turkey in September 2021.⁴⁸ The organization also secured the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Turkmen News, 'Туркменистан Объявил Касымберды Гараева и Омрузака Умаркулиева Живыми и Свободными [Turkmenistan Declares Kasymberdy Garayev and Omruzak Umarkuliyev Alive and Free]' (*Turkmen.News*, 2 March 2023) <<https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-obyavil-kasymberdy-garaeva-i-omruzaka-umarkuliyeva-zhivymi-i-svobodnymi/>> accessed 2 April 2023.

⁴¹ Information available upon request.

⁴² Information available upon request.

⁴³ Information available upon request.

⁴⁴ Information available upon request.

⁴⁵ Information available upon request.

⁴⁶ Information available upon request.

⁴⁷ Information available upon request.

⁴⁸ Information available upon request.

release of P. Allaberdyev, a prisoner of conscience, from a Turkmen prison in December 2022 with the assistance of Freedom Now, another human rights organization.⁴⁹

25. Begmedova's family members have suffered at the hands of Turkmen authorities. In 2002, her husband's brother, Hadjiev, and his friend, Amanklychev were illegally detained and tortured by government officials. In 2015, the UN Human Rights Committee recognized the illegality of their detention and torture. In 2018, the same committee held the Turkmen government responsible for the torture and death of Begmedova's sister-in-law, human rights activist Ogulsapar Muradova.⁵⁰ However, Turkmen authorities have failed to implement these rulings or uphold their international human rights obligations.⁵¹
26. In January 2022, Begmedova was denied entry into Turkey, which was assumed to be at the behest of the Turkmenistan government.⁵² In response, the human rights activist contested the decision, and in February 2023, the Ankara court of first instance deemed the ban to be illegal. However, the opposing party has since filed an appeal, and the case is currently undergoing further legal proceedings.⁵³

Dursoltan Taganova

27. Dursoltan Taganova, a Turkmen migrant worker, became a politically active figure by attending Turkmen opposition rallies and sharing anti-government statements on social media in 2020.⁵⁴ She has become the face of the Turkmen opposition movement abroad after spending three months in a deportation facility following her arrest at a protest at the Turkmen Consulate in Istanbul.⁵⁵
28. Taganova's activism arose from her outrage over the Turkmen government's weak response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a rally in July 2020 to condemn the government's inadequate response to the pandemic which occurred in Turkey, Taganova

⁴⁹ THF, 'Пыгамбергелды Аллабердыев на свободе. [Pygambergeldy Allaberdyev at large]' <<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/c562b08a-2ac0-4731-aeaa-8c84ec87a127>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, 'Turkmenistan: UN Blames Government for Activist's Death' (*Human Rights Watch*, 9 August 2018) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/09/turkmenistan-un-blames-government-activists-death>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Information available upon request.

⁵³ Information available upon request.

⁵⁴ THF, 'Туркменскую Активистку Дурсолтан Таганову Освободили в Турции. [Turkmen Activist Dursoltan Taganova Has Been Released in Turkey.]' *Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* (30 September 2021) <<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/a51eb50b-ad9c-4610-baa0-dfcb496315be>> accessed 18 February 2023; Радио Азатлык, 'Дурсолтан Таганова: Они хотят, чтобы мы замолчали [Turkmen activist Dursoltan Taganova spoke about her arrest, release and future plans]' *Радио Азатлык* (2 October 2021) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31488276.html>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁵⁵ Радио Азатлык, 'Дурсолтан Таганова' (n 54); THF, 'Туркменскую Активистку Дурсолтан Таганову Освободили в Турции. [Turkmen Activist Dursoltan Taganova Has Been Released in Turkey.]' (n 54); Радио Азатлык, 'В Турции Задержана Дурсолтан Таганова, На Активистов Оказывают Давление [Dursoltan Taganova Detained in Turkey, Activists Are Being Pressured]' *Радио Азатлык* (27 September 2021) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31480502.html>> accessed 18 February 2023.

was detained along with other protesters and held in a deportation facility after the protest was dispersed by Turkish police. The consulate accused Taganova and four others of interfering with the work of Turkmen diplomats and threatening violence against them. Although the accusation was dismissed, Taganova remained in custody, and she was eventually released in October 2020 after 11 human rights organizations called on Turkey not to deport her back to Turkmenistan.⁵⁶

29. Taganova's family has been pressured to publicly denounce her opposition actions, and she has become the target of a smear campaign by Lebap officials. Local Turkmen officials and women's groups have warned that she is a traitor who wants to organize demonstrations and destabilize the country.⁵⁷ Her family has also come under scrutiny, with several members questioned by Turkmen police and forced to call her a "traitor" on a video recording.⁵⁸

Burial Issues

30. The challenges faced by Turkmen seeking to obtain citizenship in Turkey are part of a broader set of difficulties the community faces in the country. In addition to citizenship, the lack of repatriation services for deceased Turkmen in Turkey has resulted in mass burials in cemeteries such as Kilos and Cologne, highlighting the need for improved support and services for this marginalized group.⁵⁹ At the Kilos cemetery, the precise number of Turkmen buried is unknown, but one observes communal graves of Turkmen in three parts of a huge cemetery.⁶⁰ In March 2020, at least 53 Turkmen citizens who were poisoned with tainted alcohol were buried at the Kilos Cemetery, many of whom were unable to have their bodies sent back to Turkmenistan to be buried.⁶¹ Even

⁵⁶ Радио Азатлык, 'В Турции Задержана Дурсолтан Таганова, На Активистов Оказывают Давление [Dursoltan Taganova Detained in Turkey, Activists Are Being Pressured]' (n 55); Радио Азатлык, 'Дурсолтан Таганова' (n 54); Радио Азатлык, 'В Турции Задержана Дурсолтан Таганова, На Активистов Оказывают Давление [Dursoltan Taganova Detained in Turkey, Activists Are Being Pressured]' (n 55); Радио Азатлык, '11 Правозащитных Организаций Призвали Турецкие Власти Не Депортировать Туркменскую Активистку Дурсолтан Таганову [11 Human Rights Organizations Called on Turkish Authorities Not to Deport Turkmen Activist Dursoltan Taganova]' *Радио Азатлык* (12 October 2020) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30888869.html>> accessed 4 April 2023.

⁵⁷ Farangis Najibullah, "'Turkmenistan's Tsikhanouskaya': Activist Determined To Fight For Democratic Change, Says 'We Are Not Afraid Anymore'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (11:16:55Z) <<https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-tsikhanouskaya-activist-determined-to-fight-for-democratic-change-says-we-are-not-afraid-anymore-/30927728.html>> accessed 19 February 2023.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Стамбульское Кладбище – Последнее Пристанище Для Умерших На Чужбине Туркмен* (Directed by Azatlyk Radiosy, 2022) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u28zxSEyq8M>> accessed 19 February 2023.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Радио Азатлык, 'Жертвами Отравления Фальшивой Водкой в Стамбуле Стали 53 Граждан Туркменистана, 15 Находятся в Тяжелом Состоянии [53 Citizens of Turkmenistan Became Victims of Poisoning with Fake Vodka in Istanbul, 15 Are in Serious Condition]' *Радио Азатлык* (28 March 2020) <<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30514715.html>> accessed 19 February 2023; *Стамбульское Кладбище – Последнее Пристанище Для Умерших На Чужбине Туркмен* (n 59).; Information available upon request.; The same situation is in two more cemeteries on the outskirts of Istanbul. While certain graves may be discerned as belonging to Turkmen individuals through the identification of the green Turkmen flag which marks the tomb, numerous others lack such markers, with some tombstones entirely absent.

greater difficulties ensued regarding the loss of lives due to the catastrophic earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February 2023. Activists groups report that the lack of passports meant it was extremely difficult for loved ones to identify their dead or to arrange for repatriation of the bodies back to Turkmenistan, resulting in significant difficulties for the deceased's families to provide proper burial and mourning practices in accordance with their cultural and religious traditions.⁶² Thus, the exact number of illegal Turkmen who perished remains unknown.⁶³ This is due to the fact that some Turkmen possess outdated passports, while others have lost their passports altogether.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the consulate has failed to address this issue for a prolonged period of time meaning the government of Turkmenistan is guilty of concealing vital information about the deaths of Turkmen citizens, which is in direct violation of their right to access information.⁶⁵

Right to Protest

31. In 2020 and 2021, Turkish authorities categorically refused requests by Turkmen activists to hold protests, in large part due to coronavirus restrictions in Turkey.⁶⁶ In July 2020, seven activists reported attempting to receive permission from Turkish authorities to protest but being met with a categorical refusal at the behest of Turkmen authorities.⁶⁷
32. In August 2022, a group of Turkmen activists approached the Turkmen consulate in Istanbul, attempting to deliver a letter addressed to President Serdar Berdimykhamedov.⁶⁸ The group was led into the courtyard of the consulate.⁶⁹ After trying to hand over the letter to officials, the group was beaten by unknown masked individuals who came out of the side door of the consulate. Representatives of the diplomatic corps beat two women and three men, with one activist suffering severe head injuries.⁷⁰ These individuals assert that the Turkmen consulate has violated their fundamental rights to free expression, assembly, and association.⁷¹

⁶²Information available upon request.

⁶³Information available upon request.

⁶⁴Information available upon request.

⁶⁵Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (A/RES/217(III)); Information available upon request.

⁶⁶Information available upon request.

⁶⁷Information available upon request.

⁶⁸ THF, 'В Турции Сотрудники Консульства Туркменистана Избили Активистов и Адвоката. Они Хотели Передать Письмо Президенту Сердару Бердымухамедову. [In Turkey, Employees of the Consulate of Turkmenistan Beat Activists and a Lawyer. They Wanted to Deliver a Letter to President Serdar Berdimuhamedov.]' *Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* (2022) <<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/c2a7c630-3726-45b7-90e5-9697f2a06358>> accessed 18 February 2023.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Transnational Repression and Intimidation of Dissidents' Families

33. The Turkmen government's crackdown on dissent extends beyond targeting activists and opposition figures, as the authorities also harass and intimidate their family members inside the country. Family members of dissenters, including juveniles as young as 14 years old, are harassed by Turkmen authorities.⁷² The Ministry of National Security holds meetings with the relatives of dissenters, aimed to pressure them to urge their relatives to return or to cut off communication with their loved ones on threat of violence.⁷³
34. Rozybai Dzhumamuradov, a Turkmen activist and journalist, and his family members have been harassed by Turkmen authorities in retaliation for his peaceful opposition activities.⁷⁴ Authorities interrogated Dzhumamuradov's 14-year-old nephew in early May 2021.⁷⁵ This campaign of intimidation is part of a larger trend of transnational repression against regime critics living outside of Turkmenistan by terrorizing their relatives inside the country. The harassment of Dzhumamuradov's family members is ongoing, with instances of intimidation and threats being made against them, impacting their daily lives.
35. Additionally, Turkmen consulates have failed to issue birth certificates to the children of Turkmen migrants born in Turkey which is a grave violation of their constitutional rights. Activist Zarina Akhtyamova recounted the challenges she faced when attempting to obtain necessary documents from the Turkmenistan consulate in Turkey. In order to secure a new passport, a passport copy, a certificate of non-marriage, and birth certificates for her children, she presented all required documentation.⁷⁶ Despite this, the consulate staff refused to provide assistance. Ms. Akhtyamova took to social media to call out the consulate and the government for their neglect of their citizens.⁷⁷ Although the consulate staff promised to issue birth certificates for her children following her visit to vote in the Turkmenistan presidential elections, they insisted that she first travel to Turkmenistan to obtain certificates of non-marriage.⁷⁸

Recommendations

⁷² THF, 'Угрозы в адрес родственников диссидентов, проживающих за рубежом. [Threats against relatives of dissidents living abroad.]' (*Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights*) <<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/5f5e12eb-44f2-4645-be10-1e1806922da8>> accessed 19 February 2023.

⁷³ Ibid., Information available upon request.

⁷⁴ HRW, 'Туркменистан: Угрозы в Адрес Родственников Диссидентов, Проживающих За Рубежом [Turkmenistan: Threats Against Relatives of Dissidents Living Abroad]' *Human Rights Watch* (14 May 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/ru/news/2021/05/14/378704>> accessed 19 February 2023.

⁷⁵ THF, 'Угрозы в адрес родственников диссидентов, проживающих за рубежом. [Threats against relatives of dissidents living abroad.]' (n 72); HRW, 'Uzbekistan: Events of 2021' (*Human Rights Watch* 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/uzbekistan>> accessed 29 December 2022.

⁷⁶ THF, 'Как Одна Справка и Туркменские Чиновники Довели Многодетную Мать До Отчаяния. - ТМHelsinki' *Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* <<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/fd79168e-7031-4d8f-87b5-94ff0f163830>> accessed 2 April 2023.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

36. We urge member states to raise the following recommendations with the governments of Turkmenistan and Turkey at Turkmenistan's upcoming UPR:

- A. Turkmenistan's authorities should immediately cease the ongoing surveillance, harassment, detentions and forced returns of Turkmen activists, dissidents, and rights defenders abroad as well as the intimidation of their relatives in Turkmenistan;
- B. Turkmenistan should withdraw its request for Turkey to introduce visas for Turkmenistan citizens and ensure that all Turkmenistan citizens who lack proper documentation are able to obtain passports and identification documents in their current country of residence;
- C. Turkmenistan must also allow those who die in Turkey to have their bodies repatriated for burial in Turkmenistan;
- D. Turkmenistan should take immediate steps to ensure that its citizens are able to exercise their rights to free expression, assembly, and association without fear of retribution and bring officials responsible for violating these rights to justice;
- E. Turkmenistan should promptly provide accurate and trustworthy information regarding the well-being and whereabouts of Omruzak Omarkuliev;
- F. Turkmenistan activists and rights defenders should be treated fairly and provided all protections under international law, and Turkey should allow them to enter the country without fear of reprisals and guarantee their freedom.