

## **Open Letter to the President of Turkmenistan Mr. Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov**

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Mr. Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov  
President of the Republic of Turkmenistan  
Presidential Palace  
74400 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan  
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03 February 2009

Dear President Berdymukhammedov:

Lately the international human rights community has been receiving thousands of letters from Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, Finland, France, Sweden and others, expressing their support for the illegally sentenced Turkmen human rights activists Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiyev. The Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights received 5750 letters\*. Please find excerpts of them enclosed.

The gradual steps toward taking Turkmenistan out of its isolation, the changes in some aspects of foreign policy, the efforts to improve the country's social and economic environment give hope to the people who wrote these letters that the human rights situation in Turkmenistan will improve.

On 19 February Turkmenistan celebrates National Flag Day. On the eve of this day each year the President grants amnesty to prisoners. In this connection we call on you to demonstrate political will and release Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiyev, imprisoned in 2006 for a period of seven years for collaborating with the French television channel France 2 in the making of a documentary on Turkmenistan.

Such a decision would be an important step demonstrating the intention of the country's leadership to genuinely improve the human rights situation in it. We call on you to respond to the appeal of tens of thousands of people to release the Turkmen political prisoners and to order an investigation into the death of Ogulsapar Muradova, Radio Liberty journalist, tried under the same case, who died in custody in September 2006.

We hope that Turkmenistan will not only declare, but genuinely respect the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the international documents to which the country is a party.

This appeal is signed by:

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Krassimir Kanev  
Memorial – Donetsk Society, Alexander Bukalov  
Reporters Without Borders, Elsa Vidal  
Committee for the Protection of Journalists, Nina Ognyanova  
Kazashka NGO, Balli Marzec  
Memorial Human Rights Centre, Vitaliy Pomomarev  
Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Tajigul Begmedova  
Ukrainian Helsinki Union, Arkadii Bushenko

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## **Annex**

Excerpts from letters to Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiyev (the selection was made by the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation)

-Carol Schaber from Ohio, United States: "Thousands and thousands of people around the world are praying for you. Keep up your spirits. You are very courageous and strong human beings."

-13-year-old students from the Alexander Graham High School, United States: "You are in our thoughts."

-Dr. Weldon J. Bowling, Harker Heights: "Do not despair and do not lose faith."

-Ms. Joyce Romano, San Francisco: "We want to lend you our support in these days of hardship."

There are many letters in which people from around the world express their belief that fairness will triumph, and that Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiyev will soon be back with their children. We firmly believe that 2009 will bring freedom to Amanklychev and Khajiyev!

-Hanna, Paul and Roisin Fawell, Ireland: "We want to express our solidarity with civil rights activists that have been tortured and even killed."

-Robin: "I hope that peace will settle in and we will see an end to persecutions. Do not despair. We are fighting for your freedom."

-The Turkmen Helsinki Foundation was especially touched by Wendy Griffin's letter, sent from Ireland, which ended with a in Turkmen: "We are thinking of you all the time."

-Another greeting written in Turkmen, sent from the Netherlands, said: "We are very proud of you. Hope for the better."

*A photo gallery with pictures of the letters is available [www.bghelsinki.org](http://www.bghelsinki.org)*

