



Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan

Human Rights Watch

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Introduction

1. This submission has been prepared for the fourth cycle review of Turkmenistan in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by Human Rights Watch (HRW). This submission highlights HRW's key concerns regarding the Turkmenistan government's compliance with its

international human rights obligations since its last UPR in 2018.¹ This submission focuses on enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, and includes information about additional international human rights obligations and issues not addressed in the 2018 review.

2. Since its previous UPR, the country's human rights record has not improved, with the government continuing to severely suppress fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedoms of movement, expression, and media. The Turkmen authorities continue to exercise tight control over access to information, intimidate and incarcerate journalists, civil activists and others critical of the government, including in exile. Dozens of people remain victims of enforced disappearance.

Freedom of expression in the media and online

During the third cycle of UPR, Turkmenistan received recommendations to ensure freedom of expression and access to information.² These recommendations have not been implemented in practice.

The government controls all print and electronic media. Independent foreign and Turkmen media outlets have no access to the country and authorities severely retaliate against people who provide them information. Popular social networks and messaging apps remain blocked.³

Although Turkmen law does not explicitly outlaw Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), it bans "uncertified" encryption programs and criminalizes "deliberately providing illegal services that provide technical programs" online with a maximum seven-year imprisonment.⁴ Since 2019 the government has been systematically blocking all Virtual Private Networks (VPN) services and ramped up efforts by blocking entire subnets, which facilitate more efficient network traffic, of providers of virtual/dedicated server services in 2022.⁵ Authorities severely punished various individuals, including phone repairmen and information technology specialists, for installing VPNs to clients by imposing arrests, fines, and administrative sentences⁶ on unknown charges. Police interrogated people suspected of using VPNs and threatened them with criminal prosecution⁷; carried out sporadic inspections of students' mobile

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/t-mindex>.

² United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 116.64 (Germany), 116.60 (UK and Northern Ireland), 116.63 (Estonia), 116.71 (Australia), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3

³ "В Туркменистане снова не работают VPN", *Radio Azatlyk*, July 16, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31944875.html>. "Власти Туркменистана блокируют доступ к социальным сетям YouTube, Facebook и Twitter," *TIHR*, 27 November 2012, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2012/11/dostup-k-youtube-facebook-i-twitter/>.

⁴ Criminal Code of Turkmenistan, <https://minjust.gov.tm/ru/hukuk/merkezi/hukuk/204>, Art. 381,

⁵ "В Туркменистане вновь массово блокируют VPN серверы," *Turkmen.news*, February 25, 2022, <https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-vpn-ip/>. "Туркменистан массово переходит на ICQ. В стране новые блокировки подсетей," *Turkmen News*, September 2, 2022, <https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-massovo-perekhodit-na-icq-v-strane-novye-blokirovki-podsetej/>. "В Туркменистане почти полностью заблокировали интернет," *Turkmen News* April 11, 2022, <https://turkmen.news/turkmenistan-internet-stop/>.

⁶ "В Ашгабате несколько десятков человек арестованы на 15 суток за настройку VPN на телефонах", *Radio Azatlyk*, August 22, 2020, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/30796949.html>.

⁷ "В Туркменистане продолжается борьба с ВПН, пользователей вызывают на допрос," *Radio Azatlyk*, February 9, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31694427.html>.

phones' and threatened them for accessing social media and the websites of "banned" outlets.⁸

In 2020, following a severe hurricane in Lebap and Mary provinces in eastern Turkmenistan, which caused serious damage and casualties, authorities detained dozens of people, accusing them of sending videos of the aftermath "abroad;" and held in detention about 66 other people for several days, after discovering images and videos of the aftermath of the hurricane on their phones.⁹

Recommendations

Turkmen government should:

- Allow media to operate without government interference.
- Ensure unobstructed internet access and stop blocking access to independent news websites, networks and messaging apps.
- Cease any form of intimidation and retaliation against VPN and social media users, and others who seek to obtain, exchange, or disseminate independent/alternative information about the situation in the country.
- Respect privacy and freedom of expression rights for people in Turkmenistan by allowing them to use encrypted messaging services without repercussions.
- Repeal relevant articles of the criminal code that may potentially outlaw the use and installation services of VPNs.

Civil society, activists and visits by UN Special Procedures

All of the recommendations that states advanced during the last UPR review regarding civil society and human rights defenders¹⁰, and developing a schedule of all UN Special Procedures to visit the country remain relevant.¹¹

The environment for development of civil society remains hostile with burdensome registration requirements for NGOs. Unregistered groups are forbidden, punishable by administrative penalties.¹² There are no independent human rights organizations in Turkmenistan. Despite amendments adopted in

⁸ "Студентов склоняют к сотрудничеству с МНБ за посещение заблокированных сайтов," *Radio Azatlyk*, January 27, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31673035.html>. "В Туркменистане у школьников проверяют телефоны на наличие VPN, политики и порнографий" (*azathabar.com*), *Radio Azatlyk*, September 20, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/turkmen-security-check-schoolchildrens-phones/32042529.html>.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Turkmenistan Government's Deafening Silence After Hurricane*, May 4, 2020,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/04/turkmenistan-governments-deafening-silence-after-hurricane>. "Жители востока Туркменистана своими силами борются с последствиями урагана," *TIHR*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/05/lebab-mayday/>.

¹⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 116.82 (Canada), 116.76 (Estonia), 116.78 (Belgium), 116.79 (Norway), 116.80 (Germany), 116.82 (Czechia);

https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/t-mindex>.

¹¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan," A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 116.82 (Canada), 116.76 (Estonia), 116.78 (Belgium), 116.75 (Norway), 116.79 (Norway), 116.80 (Germany), 116.82 (Czechia), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/t-mindex>.

¹² Administrative Code of Turkmenistan, <https://wipolex-res.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/ru/tm/tm033ru.pdf>, Art. 65.1.

2020 and revision of one aspect of registration requirements,¹³ we are not aware of any independent NGOs registered.

The government severely punishes any dissent, perceived opponents and peaceful critics, harasses and intimidates individual activists, including in exile, and retaliates against their relatives. In 2021 authorities sentenced Murad Dushemov to four years in prison for publicly demanding access to information about Covid-19; in 2020 YouTube blogger Murat Ovezov was sentenced to five years on bogus fraud charges for openly expressing his critical views online.

Soltan Achilova, a correspondent with a Vienna based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), has repeatedly been subjected to intimidation. In April 2022, law enforcement threatened people with whom Achilova had spoken with “serious problems,” and forced them to stop communicating with her.¹⁴

Natalia Shabunts, one of the country's very few openly active human rights defenders, for two weeks in June 2020, was under surveillance by security agents.¹⁵

In May 2022, Agadjuma Bayramov was released from prison after serving a six-year sentence on trumped-up charges in retaliation for interviews he had given on Azatlyk radio on social issues. He reported that he lost his hearing as a result of torture and ill-treatment in detention and that he served two years in the notorious Ovadan-Depe prison.¹⁶ Since his release, authorities have repeatedly prevented him from undertaking any domestic travel and ordered his family and relatives to cease communicating with him.¹⁷

Human Rights Watch has verified several incidents, in 2022, 2021 and 2020, in which Turkmen authorities have pressured, coerced, and intimidated people in Turkmenistan in retaliation for the activism of their relatives abroad. Examples include intimidating police visits that were paid to 80-year-old Khalida Izbastinova, mother of Farid Tukhbatulin, the head of TIHR, between November 2021 and

¹³ Закон Туркменистана «О внесении изменений и дополнений в Закон Туркменистана «Об общественных объединениях», 3 September 2020, https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/index.php/ru/post/36400/zakon-turkmenistana-%3Cbr%3Eo-vnesenii-izmenenii-i-dopolnenii-v-zakon-turkmenistana-ob-obschestvennykh-obedineniyakh-*, Art. 9, Pt. 3

¹⁴ “Туркменские спецслужбы оказывают психологическое давление на журналиста Солтан Ачилову,” *TIHR*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2022/04/achilova-surveillance/>. In August 2020, police threatened to arrest Achilova, for photographing a school bazaar in Ashgabat. “В Ашхабаде полицейский напал на журналистку Солтан Ачилову,” *TIHR*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/08/achilova/>. In March 2019, the border control authorities barred Achilova from boarding a flight abroad; the ban was lifted in August 2019. “Журналистке Солтан Ачиловой запретили выезжать из Туркменистана,” *TIHR*, March 14, 2019; <https://www.hronikatm.com/2019/03/soltan-achilova/>. Human Rights Watch, *Turkmenistan World Report Chapter, Events of 2019*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/turkmenistan>.

¹⁵ “Спецслужбы Туркменистана усилили контроль за правозащитницей перед днем рождения Бердымухамедова,” *TIHR*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2020/06/shabunts/>.

¹⁶ “За интервью Радио «Азатлык» пожилого мужчину 6 лет пытали в тюрьме в Туркменистане,” *TIHR*, May 27, 2022, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2022/05/6-years-for-interview/>. “Prove They are Alive!,” *Ovadan Depe: Medieval Torture in Modern Turkmenistan*, September 24, 2014, <https://provetheyarealive.org/ovadan-depe-medieval-torture-in-modern-turkmenistan/>.

¹⁷ “Отсидевший 6 лет за интервью Радио «Азатлык» Агаджума Байрамов все еще фактически находится под домашним арестом,” *TIHR*, November 14, 2022, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2022/11/agajuma-bayramov/>.

January 2022.¹⁸

Examples of Persecution and Attacks on Turkmen Activists in Turkey, presumably as a result of pressure from the Turkmen authorities on the law enforcement authorities of Turkey:

- On August 16, 2022, in Turkey, six men, allegedly consulate employees, beat five Turkmen activists in the courtyard of the Turkmen consulate in Istanbul, inflicting head injuries on one of them. The activists, whom consular staff admitted onto the premises, were attempting to deliver an open letter to President Berdymukhamedov regarding the dire situation many Turkmen migrants face abroad.
- On August 1, 2021, in Istanbul, Turkey, unknown individuals attacked a group of Turkmen migrant workers, preventing them from holding a rally at the Turkmen consulate there. Turkish police briefly detained about 10 Turkmen nationals who attempted to participate in the protest. Unidentified men beat and stabbed Aziz Mammedov, after he posted online a video of the attack. Three men lured blogger Farhad Durdyev into the consulate, where several people, including diplomats, beat and threatened him for several hours. Durdyev was released several hours later, after Turkish police intervened.
- Dorsultan Taganova, a civic activist was repeatedly harassed. In July 2020, Turkish police, following a complaint of the Consulate of Turkmenistan, detained Taganova. In October 2020 she was released.¹⁹ In 2021 she was repeatedly summoned by Turkish police.²⁰

In January 2022, Turkey imposed an entry ban on Tadjigul Begmedova, head of the exiled Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. The ban was reportedly initiated on the basis of a request from Turkmenistan government - an action seen as direct interference in Begmedova's ability to carry out her normal human rights work.²¹ In 2023, a Turkish court issued a decision overturning this ruling, but the authorities have appealed the decision. At this writing a decision on the appeal was pending.²²

No international human rights monitors have been allowed into Turkmenistan. Despite a nominal standing invitation of the Turkmen government since 2018 to all UN special procedures to visit the country, since 2003, 15 United Nations special procedures have requested, but have not been granted, visits.²³ During the Human Rights Committee's review of Turkmenistan in March 2023, the state delegation said that visits were considered and that there have been discussions with individual mandate holders. It claimed that the government considered a visit by the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, but that it had to be postponed due to the pandemic.²⁴

¹⁸ "Turkmenistan: Threats Against Relatives of Dissidents Abroad," Human Rights Watch news release, May 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/13/turkmenistan-threats-against-relatives-dissidents-abroad>. "Turkmenistan: Attack on Activist's Mother," Human Rights Watch news release, November 6, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/06/turkmenistan-attack-activists-mother>.

¹⁹ "Turkey: Turkmen Activist Faces Deportation," Human Rights Watch news release, October 12, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/12/turkey-turkmen-activist-faces-deportation>.

²⁰ "Pressure on Turkmen Nationals in Turkey Must Be Stopped," Human Rights Watch news release, November 2, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/02/pressure-turkmen-nationals-turkey-must-be-stopped>.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, information on file. January 1, 2023.

²² Human Rights Watch, information on file. March 2023.

²³ Meeting summary "In Dialogue with the Turkmenistan, Experts of the Human Rights Committee Praise Measures to Review Judicial Independence, Raise Issues Concerning Corruption and Targeting of Human Rights Defenders", March 2, 2023, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2023/03/dialogue-turkmenistan-experts-human-rights-committee-praise>.

²⁴ Meeting summary "In Dialogue with the Turkmenistan, Experts of the Human Rights Committee Praise Measures to Review Judicial Independence, Raise Issues Concerning Corruption and Targeting of Human Rights Defenders", March 2, 2023, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2023/03/dialogue-turkmenistan-experts-human-rights-committee-praise>.

Recommendations

Turkmen Government should:

- Grant the **15** UN special procedures whose requests to visit the country are still pending with the government and as a matter of priority facilitate visits by the Special Rapporteur on torture and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial or summary or arbitrary executions, who have previously requested to visit the country, and allow access for other independent monitors, including nongovernmental groups;
- Cease the practice of harassment and intimidation of independent journalists, civil society activists and other critical voices, including in exile and their family members in Turkmenistan. Ensure they can carry out their work without fear of government retribution and undue government interference.

Political prisoners, freedom from torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances

During the third cycle of the UPR in 2018, Turkmenistan received and accepted 16 recommendations on ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and establishing a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM).²⁵ The government failed to implement these key UPR recommendations from previous reviews²⁶

Turkmenistan supported the recommendation to provide information on persons reported disappeared in custody to families²⁷ and also received recommendations to end and investigate all allegations of torture, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention²⁸; release human rights defenders²⁹ and whereabouts of all persons, whose fate is unknown;³⁰ grant full access to detention facilities to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other international mechanisms; and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED).³¹ Turkmenistan failed to implement fully these recommendations.

While the exact number of individuals imprisoned on what appear to be politically motivated charges is unknown, authorities have released some individuals imprisoned on bogus politically motivated charges since May 2018. They include: Saparmamed Nepeskuliev, a freelance journalist who has worked with

²⁵ Technical consultations on ratification of the Optional Protocol to Convention against Torture, November 11, 2021, <https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/158044-technical-consultations-ratification-optional-protocol-convention-against-torture>.

²⁶ Joint Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan, 30th session of the UPR; 3rd cycle, October 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/node/316943/printable/print>; https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CAT-OP&Lang=en.

²⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para.114.37 (Sweden), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

²⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 116.42 (USA), 116.43 (Italy), 116.45 (Canada), 116.48 (Canada), 116.49 (Netherlands), 116.51 (Argentina), 116.52 (Poland), 116.56 (Austria), 116.79 (Norway), 116.80 (Germany); https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

²⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para 116.75 (Norway), 116.81 (Czechia), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para 116.46 (Chilie), 116.53 (Norway), 116.55 (Germany); https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

³¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para 116.10 (Germany), 116.11 (UK and Northern Ireland), 116.56 (Austria), 116.49 (Netherlands), 116.51 (Argentina), 116.4 (Senegal); https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

Radio Azatlyk and the Netherlands-based Turkmen.News,³² and labor rights activist Gaspar Matalaev³³, however both were released after they had completed their three-year sentences.

In December 2022 under the annual presidential amnesty authorities released:

- Pygambergeldy Allaberdyev, a lawyer sentenced to a six-year prison term in September 2020 on bogus charges for alleged connections with activists abroad.
- Khursanai Ismatullayevs, a doctor who was seeking justice for her unfair dismissal and who was sentenced in 2021 on bogus fraud charges brought against her after her case was mentioned at a public event organized by Members of the European Parliament.
- Seryozha Babaniyazov, sentenced to two years in 2021 on bogus pornography charges, in retaliation for posting leaflets criticizing corruption in Balkanabat.

While their releases are welcomed, other individuals remain behind bars on politically motivated grounds. They include:

- Nurgeldy Halykov, a freelance correspondent with the Turkmen.news, sentenced in 2020 to four years on fabricated fraud charges after he had sent a photo to the Turkmen.news of the World Health Organization's (WHO) delegation visit to Turkmenistan in 2020.
- Mansur Mengelov, an activist for Baloch minority rights, sentenced to 22 years imprisonment in an unfair trial in 2012.
- Dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyazov was released in March 2019 after 11 years in prison, but authorities sent him for a five-year term of forced internal exile, which they claimed was part of his initial sentence.

Enforced disappearances and the use of arbitrary, incommunicado detention have continued. Dozens of prisoners have been denied access to family and lawyers, disappeared in the country's prison system, or held incommunicado following unfair and closed trials in the late 1990s and early 2000s, meaning that they have been forcibly disappeared for a minimum of 20 years now. According to Prove They Are Alive, an international campaign dedicated to ending enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan, an estimated 162 people have been forcibly disappeared in Turkmen prisons. At least 27 of them died in prison in solitary confinement. The terms of nearly three dozen expired between 2017-2022, but their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

In 2018, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) found the Turkmen government responsible for the torture and death of human rights activist Ogulsapar Muradova, who died in state custody in 2006 after her arrest on politically motivated charges.³⁴ Turkmen authorities failed to respond to the HRC and take steps to remedy the violations of Muradova's and her family's rights.

None of the 26 men sentenced to up to 25 years in 2017³⁵ for having links to the Gülen movement and its leader, Fethullah Gulen, have been released. Two additional men sentenced in these trials died in

³² Human Rights Watch, *Turkmenistan World Report Chapter, Events of 2019*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/turkmenistan>.

³³ FrontLine Defenders, *Gaspar Matalaev released from prison*, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/gaspar-matalaev-remains-prison>; Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its eighty-first session, 17–26 April 2018 Opinion No. 4/2018 concerning Gaspar Matalaev (Turkmenistan), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session81/A_HRC_WGAD_2018_4.pdf.

³⁴ Human Rights Committee, Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 2252/2013, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2f122%2fd%2f2252%2f2013&Lang=en.

³⁵ "Turkmenistan: 18 Men Tortured, Sentenced in Unfair Trial", Human Rights Watch news release, June 9, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/09/turkmenistan-18-men-tortured-sentenced-unfair-trial>.

custody in 2018.³⁶ All 28 men were tried on a variety of charges in closed trials. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions in November 2017 issued an opinion stating that 18 of these men, convicted in February 2017, were deprived of their liberty and called for their release.³⁷

Recommendations

Turkmen government should:

- Ensure that any allegations of torture and ill-treatment are promptly, thoroughly, and impartially investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted and given penalties commensurate to their crimes.
- End the practices of enforced disappearance and arbitrary and incommunicado detention; provide information about the fate and whereabouts of all those who have disappeared in prison, release those still alive and ensure they get access to medical treatment.
- Promptly release all who have been convicted on politically motivated grounds in closed, unfair trials and whose prison sentences expired.
- Ratify the OP-CAT and establish an independent national system for effective and regular monitoring of all places of detention without prior notice.
- Grant the ICRC unhindered access to detention facilities and allow it to carry out monitoring in accordance with its standard procedures.

Freedom of movement

During the 2018 UPR review, states recommended Turkmenistan reform state practices restricting freedom of movement.³⁸ The recommendation remain unfulfilled. On the contrary, the government further curbed people's right to freedom of movement, including the right to freely leave and return to their own country.

In recent years Turkmen authorities have systematically refused to renew expired or expiring passports for its citizens abroad via diplomatic missions. Turkmen diplomats often tell Turkmen citizens that passports can be renewed or re-issued only at their place of residence in Turkmenistan, compelling them to return to the country. Continued refusal to renew expiring passports deprive many Turkmen citizens living abroad of their right to freedom of movement.

Authorities bar citizens from the most economically distressed regions from leaving Turkmenistan and pressure people to persuade their relatives living abroad to return. In early 2020, migration officers arbitrarily removed dozens of people from flights to Turkey, including persons traveling for medical treatment.³⁹ In January 2022, authorities expelled from Ashgabat and Akhal province nearly 250 internal migrant workers from Lebap region because they lacked "special permits" from regional administration

³⁶ "Release Ill Prisoner in Turkmenistan for Medical Treatment", Human Rights Watch news release, September 10, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/10/release-ill-prisoner-turkmenistan-medical-treatment>.

³⁷ Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its eightieth session, 20–24 November 2017, [No. 70/2017](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-arbitrary-detention/opinions-adopted-working-group-arbitrary-detention-its-80th-session); <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-arbitrary-detention/opinions-adopted-working-group-arbitrary-detention-its-80th-session>, <https://wgad-opinions.ohchr.org/search/results>.

³⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 116.61 (USA), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3

³⁹ "В Ашхабаде продолжают массово снимать людей с рейсов, *Turkmen.news*," February 15, 2020, <https://turkmen.news/v-ashhabade-prodolzhayut-massovo-snimat-lyudej-s-rejsov/>. "В аэропорту Ашхабада более 30 пассажиров были сняты с рейса в Стамбул," *Turkmen.news*, January 12, 2020, <https://turkmen.news/zapret-na-vyezd-turkmenistan/>.

and migration authorities.⁴⁰

The Turkmen government failed to respond to a 2019 United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) complaint regarding the case of the Ruzimatov family, relatives of a former official in exile. Authorities have banned the family from traveling abroad since 2003.⁴¹

Recommendations

Turkmen government should:

- Stop the arbitrary interference with the right to freedom of movement; ensure foreign and domestic travel for all who wish to travel, including perceived government opponents, critics and their relatives.
- Abolish arbitrary requirements and/or restrictions that are used to limit the right to freedom of movement, social and economic rights, or other fundamental rights of residents.
- Provide thorough information on the basis for denial to renew or re-issue passports to citizens through consular missions abroad; authorize consulates abroad to renew or reissue expired passports to ensure Turkmen's citizens right to freedom of movement, including their right to freely leave and return to their own country, in line with international law.

Food Security

During 2018 UPR, Turkmenistan was recommended to improve the quality of life of people and prevent violations of economic, social, and cultural rights.⁴² These recommendations remain relevant.

Authorities deny the existence of poverty and a crisis of affordable food that has been accelerating since 2016. In 2020, Human Rights Watch documented that the government failed to ensure an adequate standard of living and the right to food for low-income individuals.⁴³ Shortages of subsidized food and the rise of food prices, due in large part to state mismanagement of the economy and the government's rationing of subsidized food, forced people to stand in lines for hours to access more affordable foodstuffs and forced some to cut back on food.⁴⁴ In 2021, authorities threatened and detained shoppers who vented their frustration in long lines outside supermarkets.⁴⁵ In 2022 police detained and threatened customers with fines and prosecution for complaints and purchasing more bread than they are allotted under an uncodified rationing system.⁴⁶

Recommendations

⁴⁰ "Власти выдворяют трудовых мигрантов из столицы и Ахала," *Radio Azatlyk*, January 26, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31670808.html>.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report Chapters 2021 and 2022*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/turkmenistan>, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkmenistan>.

⁴² United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Turkmenistan, A/HRC/39/3 (July 2018), Para. 114.33 (Azerbaijan), 114.52 (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), 114.54 (Djibouti), https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/3.

⁴³ "Turkmenistan: Denial, Inaction Worsen Food Crisis," Human Rights Watch news release, September 23, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/23/turkmenistan-denial-inaction-worsen-food-crisis>.

⁴⁴ "Новогодняя торговля в Ашхабаде: распродажи по приказу, рост цен на пайки и очереди за хлебом," *TIHR*, December 29, 2021, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2021/12/holidays-are-coming/>.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report, Turkmenistan, Events of 2021*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/turkmenistan>.

⁴⁶ "Штраф за "лишнюю" буханку хлеба. Продовольственный кризис в Туркменистане обостряется," *Radio Azatlyk*, January 5, 2022, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31640305.html>; <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31648887.html>; <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31704309.html>; <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-bread-rations-jail/31816546.html>.

Turkmen government should:

- Collect data on poverty and food insecurity, make the data public, use the data to more effectively respond to the rise in hunger, and monitor the situation.
- Develop and implement substantial measures that would better protect people from food insecurity and ensure an adequate standard of living for everyone.