

# 30 Days for Freedom

4 April - 3 May 2014

#FreethePress

WAN-IFRA [www.worldpressfreedomday.org](http://www.worldpressfreedomday.org)

His Excellency Islam Karimov  
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

C/O  
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16 April 2014

Your Excellency,

We are writing as part of the global online campaign '30 Days for Freedom' to call for the release of Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, and all journalists imprisoned in Uzbekistan.

Jailed for over fifteen years, Mr. Bekjanov and Mr. Ruzimuradov are the world's longest-imprisoned journalists. Both were jailed on anti-state charges in March 1999 after their extradition from Ukraine. Reports say the two were also subjected to torture before their trial and are held in prisons normally reserved for individuals convicted of only the most serious crimes.

In January 2012, shortly before his expected release, Mr. Bekjanov's sentence was extended by five years for allegedly violating unnamed prison rules. As of late 2013, he was being held in a prison colony outside of Kasan in southwestern Uzbekistan, with deteriorating health concerns. Mr. Ruzimuradov was last known to be serving his 15-year sentence in a penal colony outside of Navoi in central Uzbekistan, but authorities have repeatedly ignored inquiries about his condition.

Mr. Bekjanov and Mr. Ruzimuradov were both living in exile in Ukraine from where they produced their newspaper *Erk*. Six months after their arrest, a Tashkent court convicted them on charges of publishing and disseminating a banned publication, as well as participating in a prohibited political protest and attempting to overthrow the government.

Your Excellency, the absence of a free and independent media in Uzbekistan has undermined accountability and stifled open debate, promoting a culture of self-censorship and fear. The few journalists brave enough to continue their investigative reporting face enormous risks simply for doing their job. We urge you to promote a better environment for press freedom, and to begin this process by releasing Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, and all journalists imprisoned in Uzbekistan.

Sincerely,

**#FreethePress**  
**The 30 Days for Freedom campaign**

Organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, the '30 Days for Freedom' campaign aims to highlight the plight of imprisoned journalists worldwide in the 30 days leading up to 3 May, World Press Freedom Day.

[www.wan-ifra.org](http://www.wan-ifra.org) / [www.worldpressfreedomday.org](http://www.worldpressfreedomday.org)

