

**To President of the Republic of Turkmenistan
Mr. Serdar Berdimuhamedow
Presidential Palace
74400 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan**

05.09.2024

Mr. President Serdar Berdimuhamedow,

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our grave concern over Turkmenistan's continued failure to respect the fundamental rights of its citizens to freedom of movement and the practice at Ashgabat International Airport to groundlessly remove passengers from flights. We call You to immediately draw attention to the following violations.

One particularly concerning example is Turkmenistan's refusal to allow family members of government critics to travel abroad. On 3 April 2023, 74-year-old Yakutzhan Babajanova was denied permission to leave Turkmenistan for Umrah (minor hajj) as part of a group of pilgrims. Yakutzhan Babajanova is the mother of Hamida Babajanova, a 49-year-old ethnic Uzbek woman from the Dashoguz province of Turkmenistan, who has been living in Turkey since 2016 and is known for her critical statements on social media. Border guards prevented Ms. Babajanova from boarding a flight from Ashgabat to Istanbul. On 23 April, she was again prevented from leaving the country. It was only in August 2023, after the incident drew the attention of international organizations, that the unjustified travel ban was lifted.

However, the situation involving the unjustifiable ban on departure was repeated with Hamida's other relatives. Two of her sisters, Khurshida and Dilfuza, were denied permission to leave Turkmenistan: one to Turkey in February 2024 and the other to Uzbekistan in April 2024. In response to enquiries to the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan, they received official confirmation of the travel ban without specifying its reasons and duration. When they approached the same agency in person, they were informed that their third sister, Firuza Babajanova, was also on the "blacklist" of persons not permitted to travel:

<https://www.tmhelsinki.org/article/3de3619a-14f4-481d-a5da-65aed5b58403>

On 15 July 2024, the activist's daughter, Sadokat Nurimbetova, a second-year student at a Turkish medical university "Medipol," was not allowed to leave the country to study in Istanbul. On 23 July, she applied in writing to the Turkmen migration service. There is still no reply. The post offices in Dashoguz and several districts of the region refused to accept the Babadjanovs complaints to the Presidential Apparatus, the Ombudsman and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 1 August in Ashgabat, security guards prevented them from entering the Migration Service building:

<https://tmhelsinki.org/article/006896f7-c254-49f2-a5d7-dd4976e6e883>

There is reason to believe that the restriction of the Babadjanov` s freedom of movement is “punishment” for her speeches. In this regard, on 29 July, Hamida circulated a video message to the President of Turkmenistan on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpKzcAty7ZE&t=10s>

The bans against the relatives of activist Hamida Babajanova are not the only cases of unjustified restrictions on travelling abroad of Turkmen citizens. On 12 August 2024, at Ashgabat airport, border guards prevented 20 students from boarding a flight, and on 28 August - 60 people flying to various educational institutions in Turkey to study:

<https://www.hronikatm.com/2024/08/turkmen-students-not-allowed-on-flight-to-istanbul/>

According to three students who were barred from traveling, migration service personnel claimed that the university in Turkey had ceased operations, which is untrue. Another ludicrous reference was to a list of nine international universities where Turkmen are encouraged to study. Local officials interpreted this list as a ban on studying at other institutions, which violates Turkmen` s right to an education. At the same time, certain intermediaries offer young people \$2,000 to \$4,000 to resolve the matter, after which the departure ban is lifted.

These examples, as well as the general practice of border authorities to unjustifiably restrict freedom of movement, demonstrate a systemic disregard for the Constitution of Turkmenistan, human rights, and the international obligations that it holds.

Mr President Serdar Berdimuhamedow,

We call on you to take immediate measures to lift the illegal restrictions on traveling abroad against both the relatives of Hamida Babajanova and the students studying in Turkey who were not allowed on flights in the summer of 2024. We further urge the Turkmen authorities to implement all measures consistent with their obligations under international human rights law to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights to freedom of movement under Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Yours sincerely,

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3. *Tolekan Ismailova, Public Association Human Rights Movement “Bir Duino”, Kyrgyzstan*
4. *Gulnara Shahinian, Democracy Today, Armenia*
5. *Vyacheslav Mamedov, Democratic Civil Union of Turkmenistan, Netherlands*
6. *Galim Ageleuov, OF Liberty, Kazakhstan*
7. *Yevgeniy A.Zhovtis, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Kazakhstan*
8. *Dr. Leyla Yunus, Institute for Peace and Democracy, Netherlands*
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10. *Ganimat Zahid, Democracy for Azerbaijan, France*
11. *Anara Ibrayeva, Public Association “Dignity”*

12. *Temirkhan Misrikhanov, Association of Independent Lawyers of Turkmenistan*
13. *Krasimir Kanev, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Bulgaria*
14. *Sergey Davidis, Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre, Lithuania*
15. *Freedom Now, Washington D.C.*

CC:

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