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Wickenburgg. 14/7, A-1080 Vienna, Austria; Tel +43-1-408 88 22; Fax 408 88 22-50
e-mail: office@ihf-hr.org – internet: <http://www.ihf-hr.org>
Bank account: Bank Austria Creditanstalt, 0221-00283/00, BLZ 12000

Turkmenistan: Illegal Evictions a Routine Practice

Widespread Violations of Property Rights on the Rise outside the Capital

Vienna, 16 July 2004. The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) is concerned about the widespread violations of property rights in Turkmenistan, including the destruction of houses currently taking place in the settlement of Keshi, near Ashgabat.

Around 900 residents, living in 100 houses located on 10 streets of Keshi, a settlement near Ashgabat, received notification about their eviction. The dismantlement of a further 400 houses is planned. Residents protested, and as a number of women tried to appeal to the Russian embassy, they were detained and warned not to express publicly their opinion. On 2 July, around 70 women gathered on the main street of Keshi. The group was soon surrounded by the police, which threatened them and tried to disperse the meeting. Some of them were detained for several hours.

According to reliable information obtained by the IHF, owners of private houses generally get no compensation, and no equivalent accommodation from the government in case of eviction. Exceptionally, evicted people get a minimum sum, calculated on the basis of the official estimation of property, which is lower than the market price and does not allow the purchase of equivalent property. Some families from Keshi were offered strips of land in Choganly, a deserted place in the north of Ashgabat. But only native residents of Keshi could get this “offer”. The others are forced to return to their previous places of residence, at their own costs.

House owners in the towns of Berzengi, Geokdep, Bakharden, Kipchak, the settlement of Vanov, and the Furjusa gorge, have voiced their fear of being the next on the list of possible forced evictees.

The IHF has received continuing reports of violations of the property rights of Turkmen citizens, especially since 2001, when a reconstruction plan of the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat, was launched. This plan foresaw the destruction of many private houses and sometimes entire areas of the city. Neither appropriate financial compensations nor other substitutive accommodation were offered to entire families expelled under this plan. Furthermore, house owners and tenants were given extremely short notice of their expulsion, often less than a week.

According to reports from the human rights organisation Memorial, the illegal eviction of Turkmen citizens from their houses was carried out in 2003 in a whole settlement located 10 kilometers from the city of Turkmenbashi. 100 houses were destroyed and more than 500 people, mostly of Kazakh ethnicity, lost their property. This action was reportedly done

by the direct order of president Niyazov. Around 90 garages were also dismantled. None of the owners of these destroyed properties were given compensation or substitution.

The IHF condemns what appears to be a policy of arbitrary and illegal seizure and destruction by the Turkmen state of private property, which contributes further to the deterioration of the already bad economic situation of the average Turkmen citizen, who has to strive with massive unemployment, irregular salary payments and a constant decline of individual freedoms.

For more information:

Aaron Rhodes, IHF Executive Director: +43-676-635 66 12

Brigitte Dufour, IHF deputy Executive Director: +43-676-690 24 57