

INTERNATIONAL
STATE CRIME
INITIATIVE

FREEDOMUNITED



COTTON CAMPAIGN
END FORCED LABOR IN CENTRAL ASIA



UGF
Uzbek-German Forum
for Human Rights



His Excellency Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov
Presidential Palace
Ashgabat
Turkmenistan

May 3, 2019

Dear President Berdimuhamedov,

On World Press Freedom Day, we respectfully ask for the immediate release of Turkmen citizen Gaspar Matalaev from prison. Mr. Matalaev's case has received international outcry, as evidenced by the 97,584¹ petition signatures collected from citizens around the world calling for his release.

Mr. Matalaev is a concerned citizen of Turkmenistan, who has been monitoring² human rights violations during the cotton harvest. His work has helped draw attention to the offences against international and Turkmen laws during cotton production in Turkmenistan. We call upon you to release Mr. Matalaev and to investigate violations that he has uncovered. He was arrested on October 4, 2016 and has reportedly been subjected to torture by electric current to force him to confess to false charges of minor fraud and a bribery attempt.

In 2018, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled Mr. Matalaev's deprivation of liberty as arbitrary. Further the Working Group notes "the appropriate remedy would be to release Mr. Matalaev immediately and accord him an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations, in accordance with international law."³

Additionally, in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, Turkmenistan was ranked 180 out of 180 countries, falling below North Korea.⁴ As an act of goodwill, please heed the call of 97,584 people to release Gaspar Matalaev and investigate instances of forced labor in the annual Turkmen cotton harvest. This act will not only demonstrate your humanity, but also improve the global image of Turkmenistan and its commitment to human rights.

¹ These signatures are compiled from two global petitions hosted by the ILRF and Freedom United: <https://www.laborrights.org/gaspar> and <https://www.freedomunited.org/advocate/free-gaspar-matalaev/>

² For more information, please see monitoring reports here: <https://habartm.org/archives/5844>

³ 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/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session81/A_HRC_WGAD_2018_4.pdf

⁴ 2019 World Press Freedom Index – A cycle of fear: <https://rsf.org/en/2019-world-press-freedom-index-cycle-fear>

Yours Sincerely,

Anti-Slavery International

The Cotton Campaign

Freedom United

International Labor Rights Forum

International State Crime Initiative

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations

Solidarity Center

Turkmen.news

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