

Unjustified Expectations:

In Uzbekistan, a Preacher Extradited from Turkey Is On Trial

News:

The Uchtepa District Criminal Court of Tashkent began hearings on August 19 in the criminal case against religious figure Alisher Tursunov, known to the public under the pseudonym Mubashshir Ahmad. The news was reported by Aziz Abidov, head of the press service of Uzbekistan's Supreme Court. According to the indictment, Tursunov is charged under three articles of the Uzbek Criminal Code, including:

- **Article 156, Part 2 – intentional actions that demean national honor and dignity, insult the feelings of citizens on the basis of their religious or atheist beliefs, committed with the purpose of inciting hostility, intolerance, or discord among groups of the population based on nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion...**

- **Article 244-1, Part 3, Paragraph “g” – production, storage, distribution, or display of materials that pose a threat to public security and public order through the use of mass media, telecommunications networks, or the Internet.**

- **Article 244-3 – illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of religious materials.**

Taken together, the charges carry the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence.

Comment:

It should be recalled that Mubashshir Ahmad, like many other religious figures, believed in the sincerity of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's promises of reform after he came to power. In 2017, he founded the group Azon New Media, which included the website Azon.uz, online radio Azon FM, and online television Azon TV. The portal Azon.uz became the leading Uzbek media outlet covering religious and educational topics.

In 2021, Mubashshir Ahmad reported pressure from Uzbekistan's Committee on Religious Affairs regarding the editorial policy of the portal—something the Committee publicly denied at the time. Later, Azon.uz staff members were fined for publishing religious materials that, according to the court, could harm Uzbekistan's foreign relations.

When the portal shut down in August 2023, Mubashshir Ahmad moved to Turkey, which—like many other religious figures—he considered a safe place to continue his work. In November of the same year, he launched a new portal, Azon Global. However, at the end of December that year, Turkish law enforcement detained Mubashshir Ahmad, placing him in a deportation center. After several months of detention, he was eventually released.

Finally, in February of this year, Uzbek security forces announced the initiation of a criminal case against Tursunov on charges of “creating, leading, or participating in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist, or other banned organizations.” In May, Turkish special services detained him again, and this time he was swiftly extradited to Uzbekistan.

The case of Mubashshir Ahmad serves as an example for today's activists who hope to find safety and opportunities by cooperating with the rulers of Muslim countries. Such rulers, it is argued, lack any moral constraints and act solely out of self-interest. If it benefits them politically, they will not hesitate to hand over a fellow Muslim. And this is not to mention the fact that these rulers do not truly govern themselves—they largely play the role assigned to them by Western colonizers who brought them to power.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Muhammad Mansour