

CHINA

Nurmemet Yasin

writer in prison



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Uighur poet & story writer Nurmemet Yasin is serving a 10-year prison sentence for writing an allegorical short story that the authorities consider to be a veiled indictment of their conduct in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). He is a prisoner of conscience.

The story, “Wild Pigeon” (*Yawa Kepter*), is the first-person narrative of a young pigeon, the son of a pigeon king, who is trapped and commits suicide in captivity. He kills himself rather than sacrifice his freedom. “Now, finally, I can die free,” he says. “I feel as if my soul is on fire – soaring and free.” On the basis of this story, Nurmemet Yasin was charged with “inciting splittism”.

“Wild Pigeon” was first published by the *Kashgar Literature Journal*. The magazine’s editor, Korash Huseyin, was detained in 2005, and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment for “dereliction of duty”. He is presumed to have been released at the end of his sentence in February 2008.

Nurmemet Yasin was detained in November 2004 after “Wild Pigeon” was published. The Maralbeshi County People’s Court sentenced him following a closed trial in February 2005 and the Kashgar Intermediate People’s Court upheld the sentence on appeal in March 2005. It is unclear whether he had legal representation at the trial. He is believed to be serving his sentence in No. 1 Prison in the regional capital, Urumqi (Chinese: Wulumuqi). His family have been allowed to visit him only once. Believed to be in poor health, he is not due to be released until November 2014.

Nurmemet Yasin was born in Maralbeshi (Chinese: Bachu) County in Kashgar (Chinese: Kashi) Prefecture. In addition to “Wild Pigeon”, he is known for other short stories, essays and three volumes of poetry: *First Love*, *Crying from the Heart*, and *Come on Children*. Some of his writings are included in Uighur-language middle-school literature textbooks, and some have also been translated into Chinese, although it is not possible to buy these translations in China.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak met with Nurmemet Yasin in prison in November 2005. Nurmemet Yasin told him that, during interrogation in November 2004, the police had threatened and beaten him. In prison, he also had been beaten by fellow inmates because he did not speak Mandarin Chinese. In his report following the visit to China, Manfred Nowak concluded that “since [Nurmemet Yasin] has been convicted of a political crime, possibly on the basis of information extracted by torture, the Special Rapporteur appeals to the Government that he be released”.

China’s Criminal Law lists crimes of “endangering state security”, including “subverting state power”, “splitting the State” and “supplying (or providing) state secrets”. Over recent years the authorities have increasingly used these vaguely-worded provisions in the Criminal Law to silence and imprison peaceful activists and to curtail freedom of expression. New regulations that explicitly forbid the use of the internet to “endanger state security” and to “instigate ethnic separatism” were issued on 27 September 2009 by the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regional People’s Congress Standing Committee. Amnesty International repeatedly has called on the Chinese authorities to make a clear distinction between activities that involve the peaceful exercise of human rights including freedom of expression, association and assembly, and those that would be internationally recognized as criminal acts.

Please call for the immediate & unconditional release of Nurmemet Yasin and for a full & impartial investigation into allegations that he has been tortured, with those responsible brought to justice.

Urge adoption of policies that respect ethnic minorities’ right to ensure, preserve, and reproduce their distinctive culture and traditions and that ensure freedom of expression for all.

Chairman, XUAR People’s Government
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Salutation: *Dear Chairman*

Airmail postage abroad: 98¢

Salutation: *Your Excellency*



Amnesty International
focuses on preventing and ending
grave abuses of the rights
to physical & mental integrity,
freedom of conscience
& expression,
and freedom from discrimination,
while promoting all human rights.

Our particular concern during Banned Books Week is to draw attention to writers, editors, librarians, publishers and readers who suffer human rights violations because of their work.

from the
**Universal Declaration
of Human Rights**

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience . . .

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information & ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 27

. . . Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. . . .

All of these letters and signatures were extremely important in keeping Tissa's case alive and finally bringing about his release. We urge all of you to continue your good work so that others who are wrongly held will be able to survive.

Ronnate Tissainayagam,
wife of former Sri Lanka prisoner of conscience J.S. ("Tissa") Tissainayagam,
freed in June 2010

**Banned Books Week 2011
IMPORTANT NOTES:**

Please do not attempt to write directly to a prisoner; in some countries there might be reprisals. Experience shows that the rarity of replies from governments does not mean our letters are being ignored. If someone does receive a reply, please send a copy to the AI address on the other side (top) of this page.