

Uzbekistan To Allow Jailed Jew To Go To Israel For Medical Help

NEW YORK, NY (JTA) - A Tashkent Jew, imprisoned for some ten months for a murder he said he did not commit, was to be released recently by the government of Uzbekistan and allowed to go to Israel for medical treatment.

Dimitrii Fattakhov, 24, was expected to depart for Israel, along with his mother Frieda.

"We are very appreciative of this humanitarian gesture by the Uzbek government," said Helene Kenvin, the family's lawyer in the United States.

Diplomats from the United States, Great Britain and Germany visited Fattakhov Feb. 1, the first people to see him since his trial, said Micah Naftalin, national director of the Union of Councils, a Washington-based advocacy group for Jews in the former Soviet Union.

"He was just a mess," Naftalin said.

An officer from the Uzbek Foreign Ministry in Tashkent accompanied the Western diplomats, Kenvin said.

"We speculate that maybe one of the things that led to the decision to release him

was when he saw how poor Dimitrii's physical condition was," Kenvin said.

While in prison, Fattakhov was brutally beaten and tortured and his mental and physical health deteriorated to the point where he was deemed incompetent to stand trial, she said.

In December, the trial judge ordered Fattakhov to a psychiatric hospital, but he was sent, instead, to a prison hospital ward where he caught pneumonia.

The decision to release Fattakhov, made by Uzbek President Islam Karimov, comes after months of campaigning by several Jewish organizations and the American, German and British embassies.

"This campaign without question saved his life," Naftalin said. "Everybody can take credit for this."

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America, said in a statement that the decision to release Fattakhov "is tribute to the persistence of the various human rights groups that were monitoring the case, and to the good judgment of the top leaders of Uzbekistan who understood how damaging this case was becoming to their country's image on the international scene."

Fattakhov celebrated his 24th birthday Feb. 2, the day after the decision was announced. His mother was allowed to see him for the first time in months.

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