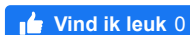


Journalist, filmmaker: ‘In Turkmenistan, only pressure works’



By [Jordan Gass-Pooré - Spring 2015](#) Mar 09, 2015



Ruslan Myatiyev, a journalist and founder of Alternative Turkmenistan News, speaks Monday about human rights violations in Turkmenistan. Myatiyev says students from his university were prevented from leaving the country in 2010 without cause. SHFWire photo by Jordan Gass-Pooré

WASHINGTON – Government officials in Turkmenistan began to disappear in spring 2002.

They were called in for meetings with the country’s first president, Saparmurat Niyazov, Kate Watters with the [Prove They Are Alive](#) campaign said Monday at a panel discussion on the state of human rights in Turkmenistan at the [Open Society Foundation](#).

There they were arrested, detained, tried – often without legal representation – and disappeared into the prison system, Watters said as a slideshow of their photos or silhouettes played in the background. A new video tells the story of one prisoner who was recently released.

Watters and two other experts in Turkmen politics spoke about the repressive country, including the treatment of prisoners and religious minorities to an audience of human rights advocates and journalists.

Some families don't know which prison holds their relatives, Watters said.

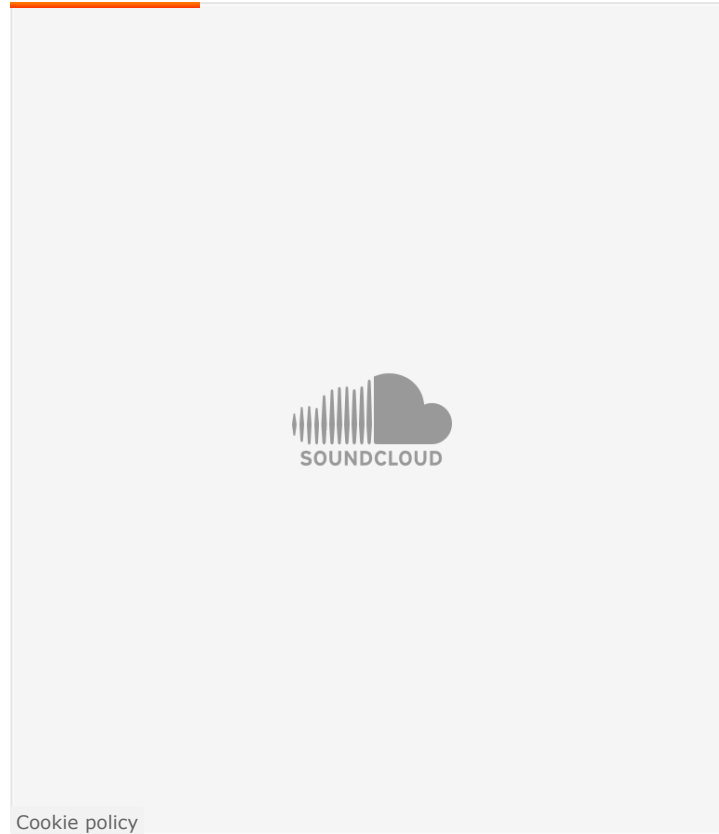
She said the Turkmenistan government hasn't spoken publicly on the issue.

When Niyazov died in 2006, people thought his successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, might reform the country's oppressive laws, but that hasn't happened.

Turkmenistan is considered by [Human Rights Watch](#) to be one of the most repressive countries in the world.

Media and religious freedoms are subject to draconian restrictions, despite that Turkmenistan's constitution includes religious freedom, the separation of church and state and religious

equality.



“In Turkmenistan, only pressure works,” Ruslan Myatiyev, a journalist and founder of [Alternative Turkmenistan News](#), said.

Myatiyev, who is from Turkmenistan, was a [Scripps Howard Foundation Wire](#) intern in 2006.

He said his sources in Turkmenistan risk their lives to send photos and information to him.

Myatiyev showed excerpts from his movie, “[Turkmenistan: Life Behind Bars.](#)”

In the movie, Myatiyev interviews Stanislav Romaschenko, who served more than 11 years of a 19-year sentence in the notorious Ovadan-Depe and other prisons in Turkmenistan. He was charged with robbery and attempted murder – the victim denied that Romaschenko, a Russian citizen, tried to kill her.

Romaschenko was released and deported in July 2014 after Russian diplomats became involved, Myatiyev said.

Life has improved for Romaschenko. He has a job and plans to marry in July, said Myatiyev, who communicates with him daily. It took some time to convince him to share his experiences in the Turkmen prison system because he was afraid of government repercussions.

Romaschenko finally agreed because of the country's many human rights violations. He details one of these violations in the video when he describes prison guards putting salt into prisoners' self-inflicted wounds.

"The laws must meet the international standards, but the laws are dead," Myatiyev said.

Myatiyev moved to the Netherlands in 2010. His family moved there the following year.

Watters said Turkmenistan, which has 5 million people, with 20,000 prisoners, has one of the highest prisoner-to-population ratios in the world.

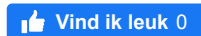
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Jordan Gass-Pooré is a Spring 2015 reporter for the SHFWire from Texas State University.



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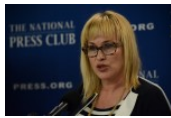


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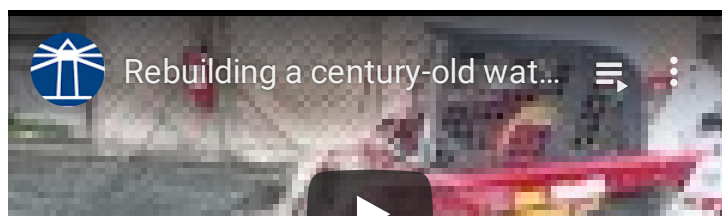


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