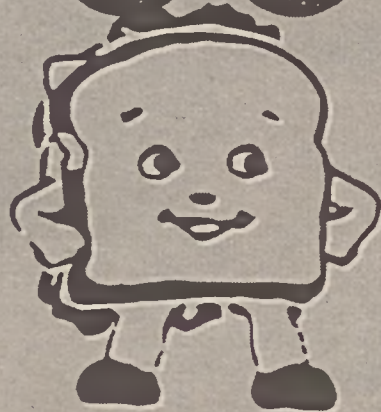


★ **NOW OPEN** ★
check out our great beer & wine selection



DELI



sandwiches made from the freshest ingredients - breads baked daily at local bakers - meats, cheeses & veggies cut fresh daily - homemade salads

Catering Available - Call in orders welcome 704.334.5991
2007 Commonwealth Ave, at corner of Thomas St.

Uzbekistan man sentenced to five years for 'homosexual conduct'

Human Rights Watch believes gay journalist and human rights activist forced to plead guilty

by John Shook

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — On August 13 an Uzbekistan court sentenced Ruslan Sharipov, 25 — an openly gay, independent human rights activist and journalist — to five and a half years in prison. Sharipov had been a fearless critic of police corruption and human rights abuses in the former Soviet and predominately Muslim Uzbekistan.

Police arrested Sharipov on May 26 and charged him under Article 120 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which punishes "besakalbazlyk" (homosexual conduct, defined as "consensual satisfaction of the sexual needs of one man with another man") with up to three years in prison. After taking him into custody, police also charged Sharipov under Article 127 (involving minors in "antisocial behavior") and Article 128 (having sexual relations with minors).

Until August 8, Sharipov had denied the charges and declared that they were fabricated in an attempt to silence him and put a stop to his human rights work. That day, he read a written statement in court waiving his right to counsel, declaring his intention to plead guilty on all charges, and asking that the only outside observer to the proceedings — his mother — be dismissed from the courtroom.

Sharipov further offered to publicly beg for the forgiveness of President Islam Karimov, the Minister of the Interior and local police and retracted all articles critical of the government that he had written from 2001 to 2003.

"He was probably beaten and destroyed as a person if he plead guilty to something he didn't do and was ready before to fight against," his brother, Aleksei Sharipov, said in an article written by freelance gay journalist Rex Wockner. "I don't even want to think how they could keep him without food or do something — maybe say that something can happen to his mother to be able to break his will.

"I lived there and I know that country and [the] Uzbek way of democracy. I every day

say thanks to God that I had [the] chance to move to [the] USA."

Previously Ruslan Sharipov had published a number of articles about harassment of human rights activists and torture and ill-treatment by Uzbek law enforcement agencies. He has worked alongside several international human rights organizations.

In 2001 and 2002, he was questioned by members of the Uzbek National Secret Service about his journalistic activities. He was detained in August 2001 and accused of membership in a terrorist organization.

Police interrogating him reportedly confronted him about several of the articles he had written on human rights violations in Uzbekistan, shouting at him and threatening him with rape and suffocation. Sharipov also claimed that he had been beaten by police officers.

The international organization Human Rights Watch fears that Sharipov's August 8 statements were coerced and is deeply concerned that he faces continued threat of physical and psychological abuse while in prison.

Matilda Bogner, an Uzbek Human Rights Watch researcher said August 12 that she believes authorities either tortured Sharipov or threatened him with torture to make him plead guilty. Sharipov said in earlier letters from prison that he had been under heavy psychological pressure.

"Ruslan Sharipov has been a forthright critic of Uzbek government policies for years, and has faced steady threats and harassment as a result," said Elizabeth Andersen, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division. "He should be freed, and Article 120 of the Criminal Code should be repealed."

Only three of the 15 former Soviet republics still ban gay sex — Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

— Wire reports contributed to this article.



Openly gay Uzbekistan journalist Ruslan Sharipov



Get Hot — Vita Spas
Get Felt — Connelly Billiards
Get Wet — Vinyl Liner, Fiberglass & Gunite Swimming Pools

Recreational Specialties

Lake Norman's Family Fun Store

704-896-8118

www.RecSpecial.com

*present this ad for a 10% family discount

Q-Owned Business

BARBARA HOLLINGSWORTH ATTORNEY & MEDIATOR

Specializing in Negotiation and Mediation of Relationship Issues



- Domestic Partnership Agreements
- Collaborative Negotiation & Mediation of Disputes
- Wills & Powers of Attorney

704/455-8241

6725 Robinson Church Road • Harrisburg, NC 28075