



France To Extradite Kazakh Dissident Banker

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A French court on Thursday ruled that Kazakh banker and opposition figure Mukhtar Ablyazov should be sent to Russia or Ukraine to face fraud charges.

A recognized refugee and key political opponent of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Ablyazov fled the country in 2009. He was apprehended by French police in July last year during a house raid in Mouans-Sartoux, near Cannes.

Previously, a large part of the Kazakh BTA Bank's shares were held by a group of Kazakh businessmen headed by Mukhtar Ablyazov, who is accused of stealing billions of dollars from it. Kazakhstan's third largest lender by assets, BTA Bank also operates in Russia and Ukraine.

Amnesty International called on the French government not to allow the extradition of Ablyazov.

"Today's decision by the French court flies in the face of the realities on the ground. Russian and Ukrainian security services collaborate routinely with the security apparatus in Kazakhstan," said Julia Hall, Amnesty International's expert on counter-terrorism and human rights.

She expressed fear that Ablyazov would not get a fair trial in Russia or Ukraine, and that there is the real danger that he will eventually end up in Kazakhstan, where he will be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. She called on the French authorities not to "send Ablyazov to any country where he will face serious human rights violations or be forced back to Kazakhstan."

"European governments, including France, must set an example and guarantee that Ablyazov's human rights are respected and protected. Otherwise, Europe becomes deeply implicated in the on-going human rights violations that plague Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan, where torture and ill-treatment of political opposition figures are commonplace," Amnesty said in a press release.

A July 2013 Amnesty International report had highlighted the routine cooperation of Russia and Ukraine with Central Asian republics, including Kazakhstan, in transferring people back to Central Asia, often in violation of their human rights.

by RTTNews Staff Writer

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