

† Marat Zakhidov (1940–2019)

A tireless fighter for human rights worldwide

At the age of 78, Prof. Dr. Marat Zakhidov, Secretary General of the International Council of the ISHR, has left us. It is no coincidence that he died far away from his homeland Uzbekistan, in Jerusalem on one of his many missions.

Marat Zakhidov was born in 1940 in Kokand in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan. He was a sensitive, dazzling, even controversial personality, but that drive helped him achieve a lot. As the son of the most important Uzbek scientist of his time, the zoologist Tesha Zakhidov, he had all the doors opened for him. He spent a large part of his schooling in the United Kingdom, graduating from Moscow State University with a doctorate in mathematics and physics. His passion, however, was politics. In 1989, he ran for office as a representative to the Supreme Soviet parliament of the Soviet Union and failed. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he took a chair at the University of Tashkent and engaged in politics at the same time. He became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan and ran for president, but lost to long-time President Karimov. His campaign for a constituency against his opponent, Mohammed Salih, who propagated the Islamization of Uzbekistan and the establishment of a caliphate on the borders of the former empire of Alexander the Great, shaped Zakhidov's political thinking and his political goals: preventing Islamization and securing human rights. In 1991, he founded the "Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Individual," which was primarily for victims of corruption and abuse of rights.

In 1995, Marat Zakhidov visited the ISHR and applied for membership. In 1996, in agreement with the members of the "Committee for the Defense of Individual Rights," the group was admitted as a section to the ISHR International Council. In Uzbekistan, the committee retained its name, outside the country, it appeared as ISHR section Uzbekistan.

From 1999 to 2003, five high-profile human rights seminars were held in Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan, and Bucchara on the initiative of Marat Zakhidov and with financial support from the European Commission. Nearly all Uzbek human rights organizations and initiatives, church and Muslim organizations that participated in these conferences were some of which had very different goals and positions. Despite heated discussions and differences, Marat Zakhidov managed to win them over as participants in the next seminars. Despite his clear stance on the immensely bad human rights situation under Karimov's rule, Marat Zakhidov defended his crackdown on Islamic extremists, who had propagated the subjugation of Uzbekistan's citizens in a Caliphate according to Qur'anic rules and had carried out



assassinations. The massacre of Andijan, where Uzbek members of the ISHR acted as mediators between the government and Islamists, but were taken hostage after a premature attack by the police and murdered by the terrorists, touched him personally.

Marat Zakhidov has remained faithful to his line all his life: active, always ready to undertake a difficult mission, and to stand up for victims of grave human rights violations, he has helped many people to freedom and helped many in acute need. He was generous to his friends and relentless in opposition to those whom he saw as enemies of human rights. Despite severe diabetes, he knew no peace, but traveled constantly from one country to the next. Now he has embarked on his last journey.



We have received letters of condolence from our sections all over the world, which Marat Zakhidov, as Secretary-General, has visited almost all. The ISHR lost in Prof. Dr. Marat Zakhidov an activist, a patron, and a good friend.

He will always be in our minds.

*Thomas Schirrmacher, Prof. Dr.
President of the International Council of the ISHR*

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