

## Bios for MVFHR Board of Directors

### Tamara Chikunova

Tamara Chikunova is the founder and head of Mothers Against the Death Penalty and Torture based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

In 1999 her son, Dmitry, was accused of murder and sentenced to death. In July of the next year she went to Tashkent Prison for an authorized visit with her son but was told by prison guards that she could not visit him and should return the next day. When she did she was told that Dmitry had been executed two days earlier. He was 28 years-old.

There were strong indications that Dmitry had been tortured to force him to confess to his crimes. While in pre-trial detention he told Tamara: (They) handcuffed my hands behind my back. All of them then held me by the shoulders and legs and started to swing me up and down, finally throwing me up at the ceiling...I landed on the ground on my back, and don't remember what happened next because of the pain. I couldn't speak – as though I was paralyzed. They did it four times..."

Tamara has never been told where her son was buried. She has visited many former cemeteries in and around Tashkent. "It is one of the worst things for me, that I do not know where Dmitry is buried. If I knew I would at least have a place where I can go with my grief and where I can talk to him."

To honor her son's memory and work towards a reality where no one suffers what she and her son experienced she and her group have worked on dozens of death penalty cases and helped to save the lives of many young men sentenced to death. For the past four years she has also worked with Amnesty International in campaigning against the death penalty in Uzbekistan.

Tamara was the driving force behind the organization of an international conference to be held in Tashkent in December 2003 with the goal of initiating a public debate about the death penalty and creating a platform for dialogue with authorities. The conference was blocked by the government only hours before it was due to begin. Despite regular threats and harassment, Tamara and her colleagues remain committed to stopping the death penalty in a country where human rights violations remain widespread. She has addressed a European Bank of Reconstruction and Development meeting in Tashkent and in 2004 traveled to Rome to receive a Colombo d'Oro, for her work for human rights and peace.