

## Art Critics Back Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation

**The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) has launched a campaign in support of Uzbek photographer Umida Ahmedova, who has been charged by the government with defamation, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.**

The Paris-based art organization has published an appeal to Uzbek authorities to acquit Ahmedova. The appeal is signed by nearly 1,000 artists, art critics, journalists, and rights activists from around the world.

The AICA appeal calls on the Uzbek government to dismiss the charges against Ahmedova on the grounds that art is not journalism and cannot be viewed "as an agent" of defamation.

The AICA said it is attempting to draw the attention of the international community and rights organizations to Ahmedova's case.

It says that if Ahmedova's case is not stopped, "any photo taken on the Uzbek streets could become a pretext for legal charges."

Ahmedova, 54, was arrested on December 16 and charged with defamation and damaging Uzbekistan's image with a series of photos and videos she took in remote villages that she used for the documentaries "The Burden Of Virginity" and "Customs Of Men And Women." The films focus on poverty and gender inequality in Uzbekistan.

The documentaries were sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in Tashkent.

Ahmedova, who has contributed photographs to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, says the charges against her are "groundless" and "absurd."

If found guilty, Ahmedova could face a fine and up to two years in a labor camp or up to six months in prison.