



UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
SUBMISSION FOR UZBEKISTAN

NGO Submission

New York, April, 2023

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ABOUT HRF

The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting liberal democracy. Our mission is to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted around the world.

HRF's Center for Law and Democracy (HRF-CLD) is a program of HRF. HRF-CLD promotes legal scholarship in the areas of comparative constitutional law and international law, with a focus on international human rights law and international democracy law.

INTRODUCTION

This submission was prepared by HRF for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Uzbekistan. In this submission, HRF evaluates Uzbekistan's implementation of recommendations made during its previous UPR, as it relates to the current human rights situation in the country, which is characterized by systematic, widespread, and gross violations of human rights, including: extrajudicial killings, ill-treatment, and torture and violations of the freedoms of assembly, association, expression, the press, and of LGBTQ+ rights.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE PREVIOUS REVIEW

1. As a Member State of the United Nations (UN), Uzbekistan has committed to protecting, promoting, and respecting the individual rights and fundamental freedoms laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The most recent UPR of the Republic of Uzbekistan by the United Nations Human Rights Council took place on May 9, 2018. A total of 212 recommendations were made to Uzbekistan, with the government accepting 198 and noting 14.¹ Although

¹ *Uzbekistan: Responses to Recommendations Infographic – Third Review, Session 30*, United Nations Human Rights Council (May 9, 2018), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session30/UZ/UZBEKISTAN_Infographic_30th.pdf.

Uzbekistan has made progress in implementing the recommendations from the last UPR, grave human rights violations persist in Uzbekistan.

2. With regard to the accepted recommendations in the UPR, Uzbekistan has yet to make significant progress. The following treaties have yet to be ratified by the Republic of Uzbekistan, despite having been recommended by other UN states and supported by Uzbekistan:²
 - a. Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
 - b. Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
 - c. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure;
 - d. Rome Statute of the International Court;
 - e. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families;
 - f. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; and
 - g. Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.
3. The 1992 Constitution of Uzbekistan (*hereafter* Constitution), amended in 2011, formally guarantees the protection of several human rights (*see infra* Uzbekistan's National Framework for Protecting Human Rights). However, despite these constitutional guarantees, individuals in Uzbekistan are routinely subjected to human rights violations, not least by the very existence of laws that criminalize and impinge upon their fundamental freedoms.

UZBEKISTAN'S NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

4. The Constitution contains several key provisions relating to the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens.

² Uzbekistan: UN Treaty Body Database, United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies (2022), https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=189&Lang=EN.

5. The Constitution guarantees equality before the law in *Article 18*:
All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before law without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, convictions, individual and social status.
6. The Constitution guarantees the right to life in *Article 24*:
The right to life is an inalienable right of every human being. Infringement against it shall be regarded as the gravest crime.
7. With regard to protection from torture and ill-treatment, the Constitution states in *Article 26*:
No one may be subject to torture, violence, other cruel or humiliating human dignity treatment.
8. With regard to the right of free speech, the Constitution states in *Article 29*:
Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of thought, speech and convictions. Everyone shall have the right to seek, obtain and disseminate any information except that which is directed against the existing constitutional system and some other instances specified by law.
Freedom of opinions and their expression may be restricted by law if any state or other secret is involved.
9. The Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly in *Article 33*:
Citizens shall have the right to engage in public life by holding rallies, meetings and demonstrations in accordance with legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The bodies of authority shall have the right to suspend or ban such undertakings exclusively on the grounds of security.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

10. In 1924, Uzbekistan became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and gained independence in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet

³ Uzbekistan profile - Timeline, BBC World News (May 8, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16218972>

Union.³ The following year, Uzbekistan joined the UN.⁴

11. After gaining independence, Islam Karimov, who had led the predecessor state since 1989, was elected president in an election with limited opposition participation.⁵ In 1992, Karimov banned both opposition parties, Birlik and Erk, and arrested their members in large numbers.⁶ When Karimov's five-year term limit was about to expire in 1995, he orchestrated a referendum that extended his term by an additional five years.⁷ In 2002, Karimov further extended the presidential term limit from five to seven years, in order to continue in power.⁸
12. In 1999, a series of car bombs exploded outside the Uzbek government's headquarters and several other government buildings, killing over a dozen people.⁹ In order to cover up for its own corruption and oppression, the regime blamed the Islamic Movement for the attacks, though the allegations have not been independently verified.¹⁰ Reports suggest that following these attacks, Uzbekistan joined China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an organization intended to help challenge both Islamic and ethnic extremism, as well as promote mutual economic benefits between nations.¹¹ In an attempt to stop Islamic militant groups, the Uzbek government cracked down on Muslims in Uzbekistan, and governmental religious persecution, especially of Muslims, continues today.¹²
13. In May 2005, while 23 local businessmen were on trial in Andijan for alleged affiliation with Islamic extremists,¹³ peaceful protests outside the court against

³ *Uzbekistan profile - Timeline*, BBC World News (May 8, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16218972>

⁴ *The United Nations in Uzbekistan*, <https://uzbekistan.un.org/en/about/about-the-un>.

⁵ BBC World News, *supra* note 3.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ The Associated Press, *Bombs Kill 14 at Uzbekistan Government Offices*, New York Times (Feb. 17, 1999), <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/17/world/bombs-kill-13-at-uzbekistan-government-offices.html>

¹⁰ *Mapping Militant Organizations: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, Stanford University (Aug. 2018), https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-movement-uzbekistan#_ftnref1.

¹¹ BBC World News, *supra* note 3.

¹² *HRW World Report 2022: Uzbekistan* (2022), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/uzbekistan>.

¹³ *The Andijan Massacre Remembered*, Amnesty Int'l (Jun. 2, 2015), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/the-andijan-massacre-remembered/>.

governmental corruption and injustices turned violent when armed supporters of the businessmen stormed local government offices and the detention center where the accused were being held.¹⁴ President Karimov sent troops who fired indiscriminately at protesters,¹⁵ resulting in the estimated deaths of hundreds,¹⁶ though the Uzbek government officially reported less than 200 deaths.¹⁷ Uzbekistan received widespread international criticism for the Andijan massacre, and the European Union and United States even imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan and select Uzbek officials.¹⁸ Uzbekistan never took any measures to bring justice to the victims of the massacre.¹⁹

14. Karimov died in 2016, after 25 years in power, and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the former prime minister, was elected president in what *The Economist* called “a sham election.”²⁰ While President Mirziyoyev made some improvements to specific aspects of Uzbekistan’s human rights record — such as reducing forced labor²¹ — the July 2022 shooting of protesters in the republic of Karakalpakstan, due to the regime’s decision to revoke its autonomy, made clear the Mirziyoyev’s regime stance when it comes to respecting individual liberties.²² Human rights violations persist in Uzbekistan, and many UPR recommendations remain unimplemented.

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, TORTURE,

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ “Bullets Were Falling Like Rain”: *The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005*, Human Rights Watch (Jun. 6, 2005), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/06/06/bullets-were-falling-rain/andijan-massacre-may-13-2005>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Uzbekistan: No Justice 7 Years after Andijan Massacre*, Human Rights Watch (May. 11, 2012), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/11/uzbekistan-no-justice-7-years-after-andijan-massacre>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Uzbekistan replaces one strongman with another*, *The Economist* (Dec. 10, 2016), <https://www.economist.com/asia/2016/12/10/uzbekistan-replaces-one-strongman-with-another>.

²¹ *Which nation improved the most in 2019?*, *The Economist* (Dec. 21, 2019), <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/12/21/which-nation-improved-the-most-in-2019>; see also *Uzbek cotton is free from systemic child labour and forced labour*, ILO (Mar. 1, 2022),

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_838396/lang--en/index.htm

²² *Uzbekistan: End use of unlawful force against Karakalpakstan protesters*, Amnesty Int’l (Jul. 4, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/uzbekistan-end-use-of-unlawful-force-against-karakalpakstan-protesters/>.

AND ILL-TREATMENT

15. In a step forward for human rights, in 2019, President Mirziyoyev closed the notorious Jaslyk Prison, known for its horrific human rights abuses,²³ which earned it the names of ‘House of Torture’ and ‘Place of No Return.’²⁴ Since its opening in 1999, it has held thousands of prisoners who have suffered severe ill-treatment, torture, and death. President Mirziyoyev has also engaged in several instances of mass prisoner pardons.²⁵

16. But despite these positive developments, ill-treatment and torture of detainees remain prevalent in Uzbekistan.²⁶ One particularly atrocious case was that of Farrukh Khidirov, who died in the Tashkent penal colony on June 27, 2020, as a result of injuries inflicted on him by penal colony officers.²⁷ Khidirov was heavily beaten and burned with boiling hot water, his body contorted beyond recognition.²⁸ Uzbek officials rejected accusations of torture, finding no injuries on Khidirov’s body after a supposed examination.²⁹ In another earlier case, an Uzbek woman was forced to strip and was threatened by male Kattakurgan police officers after being detained for suspected theft in July 2018.³⁰ Footage of the ill-treatment was released by a police whistle-blower, sparking a public

²³ Catherine Putz, *Uzbekistan to Close Notorious Prison Colony, the ‘House of Torture’*, *The Diplomat* (Aug. 05, 2019), <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/uzbekistan-to-close-notorious-prison-colony-the-house-of-torture/>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Uzbekistan: Freedom House Welcomes Release of Political Prisoners*, *Freedom House* (Aug. 31, 2020), <https://freedomhouse.org/article/uzbekistan-freedom-house-welcomes-release-political-prisoners>; see also *President of Uzbekistan pardons 402 prisoners in honour of Constitution Day*, *CentralAsia.news* (Sept. 12, 2022), <http://central-asia.media/18425-president-of-uzbekistan-pardons-402-prisoners-in-honour-of-constitution-day.html>

²⁶ The UN Committee against Torture found in its 2020 Concluding Observations that torture and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan continue to be “routinely committed by, at the instigation of and with the consent of the State party’s law enforcement, investigative and prison officials” (UN Committee Against Torture, *Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan*, U.N. Doc. CAT/C/UZB/CO/5 (Jan. 14, 2020), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/008/04/PDF/G2000804.pdf?OpenElement>

²⁷ *Uzbekistan: prisoner dies after brutal torture*, *Acca Media* (Mar. 7, 2020), <https://acca.media/en/5155/uzbekistan-prisoner-dies-after-brutal-torture/>.

²⁸ Will Nicoll, *A Torture Scandal Is Prompting Scrutiny For Uzbekistan’s Bid to Host the 2027 Asian Cup*, *Forbes* (Jul. 3, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/willnicoll/2020/07/03/a-torture-scandal-could-end-uzbekistans-bid-to-host-the-2027-asian-games/?sh=5d6ded124786>

²⁹ *Acca Media*, *supra* note 27.

³⁰ Sadridin Ashur and Farangis Najibullah, *Uzbek Strip-Search Victim Says Police ‘Ruined My Life’*, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Jul. 10, 2018), <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-strip-search-victim-says-police-ruined-my-life-/29355669.html>.

outrage³¹ and criminal investigations.³²

17. In most instances, Uzbek officials continue to ignore and refuse to investigate torture claims. Fozilxoja Orifxojaev, a Muslim blogger imprisoned in January 2022 for a blog post about whether it is appropriate for Muslims to congratulate non-Muslims on their religious holidays,³³ and which was deemed to ‘disturb public security and order,’³⁴ has repeatedly demanded Uzbek officials to investigate the torture and ill-treatment he experienced as a prisoner.³⁵ Despite his pleas, an investigation has not been initiated.³⁶

FREEDOMS OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION, EXPRESSION, AND OF THE PRESS

18. In a positive development for freedom of expression, President Mirziyoyev released some previously-detained journalists. Examples of high-profile cases are the release of Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, after 19 years³⁷ – two of the longest-imprisoned journalists globally.³⁸ But despite some improvements under President Mirziyoyev, the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression remain widely violated in Uzbekistan.

19. Like his predecessor, President Mirziyoyev continues to repress protesters. On July 1, 2022, protests erupted in Karakalpakstan after the regime announced that the autonomy of the formerly autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan would be revoked.³⁹ Uzbek officials estimate that, following the protests, 18 people were

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Uzbek Blogger Jailed For Facebook Post*, Human Rights Watch (Jan. 28, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/28/uzbek-blogger-jailed-facebook-post>.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *RFE/RL, Watchdog Says Uzbekistan Failed To Investigate Jailed Blogger’s Claims of Ill-Treatment*, (Jan. 29, 2022), <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbek-blogger-orifxojaev-abuse/31677171.html>.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Uzbekistan Releases Journalist After 19 Years in Prison*, Human Rights Watch (Mar. 2, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/02/uzbekistan-releases-journalist-after-19-years-prison>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Uzbekistan: End use of unlawful force against Karakalpakstan protesters*, Amnesty Int’l (Jul. 4, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/uzbekistan-end-use-of-unlawful-force-against-karakalpakstan-protesters/>.

killed, 516 detained, and 243 injured, including 38 law enforcement officers.⁴⁰ Similar to the Andijan massacre, the precise details remain uncertain. Both a regional internet shutdown and the Uzbek regime's declaration of a state of emergency following the protests, hampered access to information about the event.⁴¹ Based on an analysis of several videos and images of the protests, Human Rights Watch found that "Uzbek security forces unjustifiably used lethal force and other excessive responses to disperse mainly peaceful demonstrators."⁴² In November 2022, Uzbek officials initiated a trial against 21 protesters and one police officer linked to the Karakalpakstan protests.⁴³ The trial has raised many concerns, including concerns of transparency and impartiality.⁴⁴

20. The Uzbek regime continues to intimidate and harass journalists, who face criminal penalties for various offenses related to their work. On July 1, 2022, journalist Lolagul Kallykhanova, who runs the independent *Makan.Uz* news website and accompanying Telegram channel, disappeared after posting a video covering the Nukus protests.⁴⁵ Her exact whereabouts were uncertain until July 8th, when the Uzbek Prosecutor-General's office made a public statement confirming that Kallykhanova had been detained on grounds of "indications of crimes threatening public security."⁴⁶

21. Another recent high-profile case is that of Uzbek journalist Otabek Sattoriy, who was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison on dubious charges of

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Mark Trevelyan, *Uzbekistan lifts state of emergency in Karakalpakstan after protest deaths*, Reuters (Jul. 20, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/uzbekistan-lifts-state-emergency-karakalpakstan-after-unrest-2022-07-20/>

⁴² *Uzbekistan: Police Abuses in Autonomous Region Protests*, Human Rights Watch (Nov. 7, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/07/uzbekistan-police-abuses-autonomous-region-protests>.

⁴³ Mihra Rittmann, *Uzbekistan's Prosecution of Karakalpakstan Protestors Raises Many Questions*, Human Rights Watch (Dec. 1, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/01/uzbekistans-prosecution-karakalpakstan-protestors-raises-many-questions>.

⁴⁴ *Uzbekistan: Nukus trial compromised by transparency concerns*, Eurasianet (Dec. 19, 2022), <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-nukus-trial-compromised-by-transparency-concerns>.

⁴⁵ *In Uzbekistan, Karakalpak journalist Lolagul Kallykhanova disappears after covering protests*, Committee to Protect Journalists (Jul. 5, 2022), <https://cpj.org/2022/07/uzbekistan-karakalpak-journalist-lolagul-kallykhanova-disappears-after-covering-protests/>.

⁴⁶ *Uzbek authorities hold reporter incommunicado, restrict coverage of crackdown on protests*, Reporters Without Borders (Jul. 12, 2022), <https://rsf.org/en/uzbek-authorities-hold-reporter-incommunicado-restrict-coverage-crackdown-protests>.

defamation and extortion.⁴⁷ Sattoriy covered local corruption allegations, and the Committee to Protect Journalists found his conviction to be “a clear attempt to frighten the press away from covering sensitive issues as presidential elections grow near.”⁴⁸

22. And in November 2021, Uzbek officials banned Polish journalist Agnieszka Pikulicka from returning to her work in Uzbekistan.⁴⁹ Pikulicka, a freelance correspondent for *The Guardian* and *Al-Jazeera*, stated having been confused by the officials’ actions, as she had not reported on Uzbekistan frequently in prior weeks, nor had she received any official warning.⁵⁰ Earlier in the year, the Uzbek Interior Ministry had issued a statement only on its website accusing Pikulicka of spreading “negative and unobjective information,” in light of her then-reporting on Uzbekistan.⁵¹

23. Uzbekistan has introduced new speech-related offenses that further bolster the regime’s crackdown on free speech. In December 2020, Uzbekistan made “distribution of false information” a criminal offense.⁵² In March 2021, Uzbekistan criminalized insulting or defaming the president online and making online calls for “mass disturbances.”⁵³ Publishing online statements that urge people to violate the law, threaten public order, or show “disrespect” to the state are now also criminal offenses, and calling for mass disturbance is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. On February 3, 2022, the District Court of Khazarasp sentenced blogger Sobirjon Boboniyazov to three years in prison for insulting President Mirziyoyev under the new insult laws.⁵⁴ Sobirjon is reported to be an

⁴⁷ Mihra Rittmann, *Blogger Jailed for 6.5 Years on Dubious Charges in Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch (May 11, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/11/blogger-jailed-65-years-dubious-charges-uzbekistan>.

⁴⁸ *Uzbek blogger Otabek Sattoriy sentenced to 6.5 years in prison*, Committee to Protect Journalists (May 10, 2021), <https://cpj.org/2021/05/uzbek-blogger-otabek-sattoriy-sentenced-to-6-5-years-in-prison/>.

⁴⁹ *Polish journalist Agnieszka Pikulicka denied entry to Uzbekistan*, Committee to Protect Journalists (Nov. 8, 2021), <https://cpj.org/2021/11/polish-journalist-agnieszka-pikulicka-denied-entry-to-uzbekistan/>.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Uzbek parliament moves to criminalize ‘dissemination of false information’*, Committee to Protect Journalists (Dec. 21, 2020), <https://cpj.org/2020/12/uzbek-parliament-moves-to-criminalize-dissemination-of-false-information/>.

⁵³ *New Uzbekistan laws ban using internet to ‘disrespect’ the government, organize protests*, Committee to Protect Journalists (Apr. 28, 2021), <https://cpj.org/2021/04/new-uzbekistan-laws-ban-using-internet-to-disrespect-the-government-organize-protests/>.

⁵⁴ *Uzbekistan: blogger was sentenced to three years for insulting President*, Acca Media (Feb. 8, 2022), <https://acca.media/en/10083/uzbekistan-blogger-was-sentenced-to-three-years-for-insulting-president/>.

active member of the Uzbek blogging community.⁵⁵

24. Finally, censorship is widespread in Uzbekistan, and the regime frequently pressures the media to remove sensitive content.⁵⁶ For example, *Makan.uz* removed a report on the death of Kamalov's predecessor after being summoned by the prosecutor.⁵⁷ And in the wake of the collapse of a recently completed dam near the town of Sardoba in May 2020, which led to the evacuation of 70,000 people and which caused Uzbekistan's State Prosecutor to announce a criminal probe into "official negligence,"⁵⁸ officials pressured journalists to delete footage and commentary criticizing the regime's response to the disaster.⁵⁹

LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

25. Consensual sexual relations between men are criminalized in Uzbekistan, with sentences of up to three years in prison.⁶⁰ In 2021 alone, 36 gay men were convicted on the basis of this law, and 25 of them were sentenced to prison.⁶¹ Aside from violating international human rights law, this law creates a dangerous and threatening environment for the LGBTQ+ community in Uzbekistan. The criminalization of their sexual orientation leaves homosexual men vulnerable to violence, arbitrary detention, discrimination, torture, and other forms of abuse by the government and others.

26. Homosexual men who are abused, harassed, or physically attacked in Uzbekistan are often left without protection, due to fear of being outed or detained by police.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ Cheryl L. Reed, *Uzbekistan's Journalists: 'Censorship in Our Minds and Hearts'*, *The Diplomat* (Jun. 3, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/uzbekistans-journalists-censorship-in-our-minds-and-hearts/>.

⁵⁷ *Freedom on The Net 2021: Uzbekistan*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-net/2021>.

⁵⁸ Catherine Putz, *70,000 Evacuated After Breach in Uzbek Dam, Investigation Into Failure Launched*, *The Diplomat* (May 4, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/70000-evacuated-after-breach-in-uzbek-dam-investigation-into-failure-launched/>.

⁵⁹ *Freedom on The Net 2021: Uzbekistan*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/uzbekistan/freedom-net/2021>.

⁶⁰ Catherine Putz, *Homophobia Feeds Corruption, Abuse in Uzbekistan*, *The Diplomat* (Jun. 9, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/homophobia-feeds-corruption-abuse-in-uzbekistan/>.

⁶¹ RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, *Abuse, Discrimination, Imprisonment, Report Says*, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty (Jun. 9, 2022) <https://www.rferl.org/a/31891051.html>.

In a 2021 Human Rights Watch report, eight out of the nine interviewed Uzbek gay men did not report the abuse they experienced to the police.⁶² The only person who did file a police complaint did not mention the homophobic motive of the attack, out of fear of prosecution.⁶³ Five of the targeted activists reported having been coerced into paying bribes to their perpetrators or the police in exchange for not publicly disclosing the activists' sexual orientation.⁶⁴

27. In 2021, Miraziz Bazarov, an Uzbek blogger, was persecuted by law enforcement for "insulting and inappropriate public statements that are not in correspondence with [Uzbekistan's] mentality."⁶⁵ Bazarov was beaten and hospitalized after he expressed support for the LGBTQ+ community online.⁶⁶ Rather than prosecute the attackers, Uzbek law enforcement sought to convict Bazarov, who was eventually sentenced to three years in prison, in January 2022.⁶⁷

28. Another incident that gained international attention is the brutal killing of Shokir Shavkatov in September 2019 in Tashkent, just days after he came out in an Instagram post.⁶⁸ Shavkatov was at a club popular with the LGBTQ+ community when he was taken home by two individuals, who some believe were police officers.⁶⁹ The next day, Shavkatov was found brutally murdered and nearly decapitated. This is believed to be the result of a hate crime.⁷⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

⁶² *Uzbekistan: Gay Men Face Abuse, Prison*, Human Rights Watch (Mar. 23, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/23/uzbekistan-gay-men-face-abuse-prison>.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Uzbekistan: Target of hate crime assault facing prosecution*, Eurasianet (May 1, 2021), <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-target-of-hate-crime-assault-facing-prosecution>.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Uzbekistan sentences blogging LGBT supporter to three years*, Eurasianet (Jan. 21, 2022), <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-sentences-blogging-lgbt-supporter-to-three-years>.

⁶⁸ RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, *Murder in Tashkent: Killing of Gay Man Spotlights Plight of Uzbek LGBT Community*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Sept. 16, 2019), <https://www.rferl.org/a/killing-of-gay-man-spotlights-plight-of-uzbek-lgbt-community/30167271.html>.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

29. HRF calls on Uzbekistan to:

- a. Ensure the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment as guaranteed in *Article 26* of the Uzbek Constitution and *Article 7* of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including by:
 - i. Immediately ceasing the torture and ill-treatment of detainees;
 - ii. Effectively investigating torture and ill-treatment claims;
 - iii. Ensuring that perpetrators of torture and ill-treatment are held accountable, in particular those responsible for the killing of Farrukh Khidirov; and
 - iv. Ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

- b. Guarantee the right of everyone to speak freely, including on sensitive issues that might offend or shock, as set out in *Article 29* of the Uzbek Constitution and *Article 19* of the ICCPR. This requires Uzbekistan to:
 - i. Cease the harassment and repression of journalists and media, especially the legal harassment;
 - ii. Ensure full media access to protest sites and conflict areas; and
 - iii. Abrogate or amend the vague speech laws on “distribution of false information,” insulting or defaming the president online, and making online calls for “mass disturbances”;

- c. Continue to release political and political prisoners and anyone else who is arbitrarily detained. HRF especially calls for the release of journalist Otabek Sattoriy, Muslim blogger Sobirjon Boboniyazov, and LGBTQ+ activist Miraziz Bazarov;

- d. Stop the excessive and disproportionate use of force against protesters in violation of their right to free assembly as guaranteed in *Article 33* of the Uzbek Constitution and *Article 21* of the ICCPR; and

- e. Guarantee that the Uzbek LGBTQ+ community can live freely and equally, including by:
 - i. Decriminalizing consensual sexual relations between men;
 - ii. Refraining from all forms of persecution of the LGBTQ+ community; and
 - iii. Increasing protection of the Uzbek LGBTQ+ community, including by criminalizing hate crimes based on sexual orientation.