



FREEDOM NOW

Statement Delivered at the 39th UPR Pre-Session State Under Review: Tajikistan

My name is Matthew Schaaf and I represent Freedom Now, a US-based human rights organization. We would like to highlight human rights violations involving arbitrary detention, torture, harassment of dissidents abroad, and prison conditions in Tajikistan. This information is primarily based on Freedom Now's work representing politically imprisoned individuals in Tajikistan.

Arbitrary Detention

During the second UPR cycle, Tajikistan noted Norway's recommendation to release all individuals detained on politically-motivated charges. However, arrests have continued, including those of opposition politician Mahmurod Odinaev and lawyer Saidnuriddin Shamsiddinov.

Tajikistan's crackdown on political opposition parties is well documented, especially its targeting of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, or IRPT. During the reporting period, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued three opinions regarding 13 individuals associated with the IRPT and the UN Human Rights Committee issued one opinion calling for the release of an opposition politician. All of these individuals remain imprisoned.

The government widened its crackdown to include individuals tangentially related to the IRPT such as 80-year old Doniyor Nabiev, sentenced to seven years on extremism charges. Nabiev's crime was using his pension to help families of imprisoned IRPT members.

We recommend Tajikistan abide by the UN opinions calling for the release of individuals detained on politically-motivated charges.

Torture

Tajikistan accepted all recommendations to end torture during the prior UPR. While the penalty for torture was increased in 2020, torture remains endemic in detention facilities. In May 2020, several IRPT members and their lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov were tortured in order to coerce them into condemning Tajikistani opposition activists abroad. The Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment inquired about this treatment in a letter to the Tajikistani government in November 2020, but only received a cursory response which ignored the allegations of torture.

We recommend the UN special procedures are invited to conduct country visits within the next year and have free, unrestricted access to detention facilities and detainees.

Harassment and Extradition of Dissidents Living Abroad

The government has sought the extradition of critics living abroad, often using INTERPOL Red

Notices. In March 2020, opposition activist Hizbullo Shovalizoda was extradited from Austria to Tajikistan and sentenced to 20 years in prison on extremism charges. An Austrian court has since ruled his extradition should have never taken place.

We recommend Tajikistan end the use of international measures to target dissident Tajikistani citizens living abroad.

Prison Conditions

Tajikistan accepted several recommendations to improve prison conditions during the previous UPR cycle, though evidence of improvements is lacking.

Two prison riots occurred in November 2018 and May 2019, resulting in the deaths of nearly 80 individuals, including several IRPT members. Trials were held to punish the perpetrators in both circumstances, however proceedings were closed to the public.

Freedom Now recommends that Tajikistan allow an independent and transparent investigation into the prison riots, and widely disseminate the results.

Thank you.