

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST CRITICISES AUTHORITIES, RISKS JAIL

An independent journalist has been arrested for writing an article critical of the authorities in Tajikistan. He faces a prison sentence of up to two-and-a-half years.

Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov, who writes for the weekly newspaper *Nuri Zindagi* (Ray of Starlight), based in the capital, Dushanbe, was arrested on 23 November in the remote Soghd region of the country, where he had been working to promote circulation of the newspaper. His family were notified on 24 November that he had been arrested, and instructed a lawyer to defend him.

According to Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov's lawyer, he has been charged with "criminal defamation" and "insult through media," but the charges do not relate to any specific article or specific plaintiff. On 29 November the editor of *Nuri Zindagi* received an official letter from the Asht district prosecutor's office, demanding copies of all published articles written by Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov.

If convicted, he faces a prison sentence of up to two-and-a-half years. Because *Nuri Zindagi* received the letter from the prosecutor of the Asht district, his fellow journalists believe that the charges relate to an article he wrote about the local authorities in Asht. The article criticized local law-enforcement agencies in particular and the lack of justice in the district.

Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov is held in a detention facility in the city of Khujand, in the north of the country.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Tajik, Russian, English or your own language:

- Pointing out that journalist Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov has been detained for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 01 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

President

Emomali Rakhmon
Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki
Tajikistan,
or. Rudaki 80,
734023 g. Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Email: mail@president.tj

**Salutation: Dear President
Rakhmon**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Zarifi Khamrokhon
pr. Rudaki, 42,
734051 Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Fax: +992 37 221 02 59
Email: info@mfa.tj

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Prosecutor General
Sherkhon Salimzoda
Pr. A. Sino 126
734043 g. Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tajikistan is a landlocked country bordering China (East), Afghanistan (South) and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (North) and has an estimated population of 7.2 million. Tajikistan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The economic decline of the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union was compounded by a devastating civil war, lasting from 1992-1997.

Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rakhmon, has been in power since 1994. He has been relatively successful in consolidating Tajikistan after its devastating civil war. President Rakhmon views himself as the indispensable guarantor of stability and peace in the face of possible new unrest, including in the context of the unstable economic situation in the country and the politically unstable situation in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Amnesty International has numerous concerns about the human rights situation in Tajikistan. Torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officers is widespread in Tajikistan, and is carried out with impunity. There are frequent violations of the right to a fair trial and conditions in many of the country's prisons are inhumane. Violence against women is commonplace and freedom of speech is restricted.

In 2010 Tajikistani and international human rights groups reported that independent newspapers and broadcasters faced criminal and civil lawsuits for criticizing the government. Pressure on the media increased in 2010, particularly in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in February and in the aftermath of a September ambush in the Rasht district, allegedly carried out by Islamist militants and opposition groups, in which 28 government troops were killed. In September and October the websites of local news agencies and an opposition blog were allegedly blocked by the authorities, and tax inspections allegedly targeted media outlets that had been critical of the authorities in connection with the Rasht events.

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