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Tajikistan: Authorities suppress freedom of expression and association

The Tajikistani authorities have confirmed their decision to close a human rights NGO, despite requests by the international community not to do so including by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton. Amnesty International calls on the authorities to allow Amparo to carry out their work without interference and harassment in line with the country's international obligations.

On Tuesday 15 January, the Soghd regional court ruled to leave unchanged the decision of Khujand city court to close down the Young Lawyers' Association Amparo, and NGO set up in 2005 with some 30 members including human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers. Amnesty International believes that Amparo is being punished for trying to collect and publicize information about torture and other ill-treatment of young men of conscription age and their treatment in the military.

In October 2012, the Khujand city court ruled that Amparo should be closed for the reported violation of a number of legislative regulations including changing its office address and holding a meeting outside the territory of Soghd. Despite Amparo's request to the Soghd regional court to allow them time to rectify these issues, the appeal court ordered them to cease all activities. Amparo will lodge a further appeal against this decision.

This latest court ruling confirms fears amongst civil society representatives that the Tajikistani authorities are attempting to restrict the right to freedom of expression and association in Tajikistan. After meeting with President Rahmon on 29 November 2012, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton told the press she had raised the importance of having a strong and vibrant civil society and of "making sure that civil society organisations are not restricted in the work that they do. That means that organisations such as the young lawyers association Amparo [which] do[es] such great work [is] really important for this country." In November 2012 the UN Committee against Torture also expressed its concern at the original court ruling to close Amparo.

This latest development is an ominous signal to civil society in Tajikistan. Amnesty International calls on the international community, and in particular the EU, to remind the Tajikistani authorities of their commitments to uphold the values of freedom of expression and association, and in particular those of the HR NGO Amparo.

See also:

Press release: 23 November 2012. [Tajikistan: Dissenting campaign groups should not be silenced](#) AI Index: PRE01/579/2012

Report: [Shattered lives: Torture and other ill-treatment in Tajikistan](#) AI Index: EUR 60/004/2012

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