

URGENT ACTION

DROP ALL CHARGES AGAINST ACADEMIC

Criminal investigation against Tajikistani PhD student Alexander Sodiqov has been extended. Charges against him have not been dropped and he still faces up to 20 years in prison. He is being targeted for his academic research and for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

On 22 August Amnesty International learnt that the investigation into the criminal case against **Alexander Sodiqov** has been extended. Alexander Sodiqov is a PhD student at the University of Toronto and was detained on 16 June while conducting a research interview. The charges against him have not been dropped and he cannot leave Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, while the investigation is ongoing. Alexander Sodiqov was released on bail on 22 July after spending 36 days in detention.

Alexander Sodiqov was held in connection with investigations into a charge of "high treason" under Article 305 of the Criminal Code (punishable by 12 to 20 years' imprisonment). Alexander Sodiqov was considered by Amnesty International a prisoner of conscience who was detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, as he had been undertaking legitimate academic research intended for publication.

Alexander Sodiqov was detained on 16 June by two security officials in Khorogh, capital of eastern Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). Police went into his mother's home in Dushanbe the next day, searched it and removed computer and data storage equipment. That day, the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) issued a statement accusing him of spying for foreign governments.

Please write immediately in Tajik, Russian, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to drop the charges against Alexander Sodiqov immediately;
- Urging them to respect the right to freedom of expression in line with their international human rights obligations, including Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 OCTOBER 2014 TO:

Prosecutor General

Sherkhon Salimzoda
A. Sino Avenue 126
Dushanbe 734043
Tajikistan

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sirodjidin Aslov
Ul Sheroz 33
Dushanbe 734001
Tajikistan
Fax: +992 372 21 02 59
Email: info@mfa.tj

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Chairman, State Committee for National Security
Saimymin Yatimov
Ministry of Security
Ul Gorkogo 8
734025 Dushanbe
Tajikistan
Fax: +992 372 21 23 12

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 157/14. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR60/005/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alexander Sodiqov is a PhD student at the University of Toronto, Canada. He had been conducting research for a British Economic and Social Research Council project called Rising Powers and Conflict Management in Central Asia, led by the universities of Exeter and Newcastle. He was detained while conducting a research interview with the deputy head of the opposition Social Democratic Party of GBAO, Alim Sherzamonov. According to Asia Plus and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Alexander Sodiqov appeared on local television in Badakhshan on the evening of 18 June and the following morning. Radio Free Europe's reports said that some observers felt the television footage had been edited. On 19 June the head of the SCNS, Saimumin Yatimov, said in a statement that foreign spies were operating in Tajikistan under the guise of NGOs and trying to undermine safety and security in the country.

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is an autonomous province in eastern Tajikistan, bordering Afghanistan. It is home to only three percent of Tajikistan's population, most of whom are followers of Ismailism, a branch of Shi'ite Islam, while the rest of the Tajikistani population mainly consider themselves Sunni Muslims. Tensions between the authorities in Dushanbe and opposition political groups and local militants in GBAO have flared in the last couple of years.

In July 2012 dozens of people, including civilians, are believed to have been killed and injured in clashes between government forces and local militants in GBAO following the fatal stabbing of a security official.

Clashes on 21 May 2014 in Khorog left at least three people dead, including a police officer, and seven people injured. The fatalities took place during a police operation against suspected criminals and led to clashes between the security forces and local residents. On 24 May, one person was killed and two injured when protesters attacked a security forces building in Khorogh. Protesters left the central square in Khorogh on 26 May.

Amnesty International has documented cases from Tajikistan which suggest that people detained in SNCS facilities are at particular risk of human rights violations including torture and other ill-treatment, and that access to lawyers of their own choice is often denied.

Name: Alexander Sodiqov
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 157/14 Index: EUR 60/006/2014 Issue Date: 4 September 2014