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## Tajikistan: dissenting campaign groups should not be silenced

Tajikistan has ordered non-governmental organization (NGO) Young Lawyers Association *Amparo* to be shut down in what appears to be a politically motivated case, prompting Amnesty International to reiterate its call for civil society activists not to be harassed or intimidated.

Meanwhile two other NGOs are facing immediate sanctions from the authorities.

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.

“The closure of this well-established human rights organisation on the pretext of ‘administrative irregularities’ casts significant doubt on the genuine nature of Tajikistan’s commitment to promote and protect the freedom of expression and association,” said David Diaz-Jogeix.

Last month the Khujand city Court in the northern Sughd region ruled that *Amparo* should be closed for the reported violation of a number of legislative regulations.

Currently, *Amparo* representatives are appealing the court decision. If they lose, they will have to cease their activities immediately.

“Should the organization be forced to close it will be an ominous signal to the human rights community and the victims of human rights violations in Tajikistan not least because it undermines the government’s stated commitment of upholding the values of freedom of expression and association,” said Diaz-Jogeix.

Two other NGOs in Sughd region are facing closure over alleged administrative irregularities - *Grajdanskoe Obtshestvo* (Civil Society) and *Aktsent* (Accent), both working on civic education and electoral rights.

*Grajdanskoe Obtshestvo* learned this month that the Regional Justice Department filed a complaint with the local court asking for the liquidation of the group citing administrative violations.

The first hearing was held this Thursday and *Grajdanskoe Obtshestvo* had to postpone its activities in view of the proceedings. Also, earlier this month the *Aktsent* office in Khujand was visited by government officials who checked their documentation and activities and declared that the NGO appeared to have violated legal regulations. They fear that they too will be ordered to shut down.

The latest developments are viewed as part of the government attempts to restrict the right to freedom of expression and association in Tajikistan. Groups and individuals perceived to be critical of government officials have experienced intimidation in the past. Prior to de-criminalization of defamation earlier this year several also faced threats of criminal libel suits.

“The ongoing harassment of civil society organizations must stop. Administrative measures should not be used to silence perceived critics of the government. This contradicts the spirit of the Presidential order to de-criminalize defamation,” said Diaz-Jogeix.

“The Tajikistani authorities must ensure that all civil society activists are able to carry out their work without interference and harassment in line with the country’s international obligations.”

“Civil society activists have an important role of monitoring and engaging in a constructive, critical dialogue which should be welcomed by the authorities, and encouraged.”

**See also:**

[\*Shattered lives: Torture and other ill-treatment in Tajikistan\*](#)

[\*No Justice, No protection: Torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials in Tajikistan\*](#)