

# URGENT ACTION

## JOURNALIST JAILED AND AT RISK OF TORTURE

Independent journalist Daler Sharipov was arrested on 28 January and is held in pre-trial detention in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on trumped up charges of "inciting religious discord". Daler Sharipov is being denied access to his lawyer and is at risk of torture. He is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon**

Executive Office of the President

Prospect Rudaki, 80

Dushanbe 734001

Republic of Tajikistan

**Please use online form:**

(EN) <http://www.president.tj/en>

(RU) <http://www.president.tj/ru>

Twitter: @EmomaliRahmon

Dear Mr President,

On 28 January well-known independent journalist **Daler Sharipov** was detained by State Committee for National Security (SCNS) officers for purportedly "inciting religious discord" under Article 189 of the Criminal Code. Many of Daler Sharipov's publications have been critical of the government, and throughout his career he has covered various matters of public interest, including human rights violations and religious freedom.

On 30 January Daler Sharipov appeared at Ismoili Somoni District Court in Dushanbe, which ruled to place him in pre-trial detention for two months. On 1 February the Prosecutor General's Office issued a statement accusing Daler Sharipov of publishing "extremist" articles on religious matters and purported that he is linked to a banned extremist organization. Article 189 has a very broad and vague definition of "extremism", and over the years has been repeatedly used in politically-motivated criminal cases against dissenting voices in Tajikistan.

Daler Sharipov's arrest and prosecution is retribution for his critical publications and his work as a journalist. He has not committed any recognizable criminal offence, and via his critical publications he has exercised his right to freedom of expression. The charge of "inciting religious discord" against him must be dropped, and he should be immediately and unconditionally released.

I am concerned not only by his unfounded prosecution but also the reports that for days after his arrest, his lawyer has been denied access to Daler Sharipov. This violates both his human rights and his procedural rights under Tajikistani law, and can mean only one thing: Daler Sharipov is being subjected to unlawful pressure, and is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Over the years, the work of the SCNS, the agency which is investigating his case, has been marred by numerous allegations of use of torture and other ill-treatment, including to extract "confessions" from detainees.

**I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Daler Sharipov is released immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. In the meantime, please ensure his physical and mental integrity, including effective protection from torture or other ill-treatment and an immediate and unimpeded access to his lawyer.**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Daler Sharipov is a well-known journalist in Tajikistan who has covered issues that range from human rights violations to religious freedom. He worked for the independent newspaper Ozodagon until its closure in 2019 after years of harassment by the authorities.

Article 189 of the Criminal Code, under which Daler Sharipov has been charged, uses a very broad definition of “extremism” and is often used by the government against its critics, including lawyers, political activists and journalists. It carries a prison sentence of between five and 12 years. Those imprisoned under Article 189 included two prisoners of conscience. Khairullo Mirsaidov, an independent journalist currently in political exile, was detained on 5 December 2017 after publishing an open letter addressed to the President of Tajikistan detailing corruption of local authorities. He spent 9 months in detention (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/tajikistan-release-of-independent-journalist-a-rare-victory-for-freedom-of-expression>). The other prisoner of conscience that was imprisoned under Article 189 was human rights lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov. He was found sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2015 under several charges including under Article 189 in a case believed to have been in retaliation of his work as a lawyer in cases of individuals associated with the political opposition. In 2019 the sentence was reduced to 22 years as part of mass amnesty (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur60/6266/2017/en/>).

The State Committee for National Security (SNCS) is one of Tajikistan’s law enforcement agencies which has the authority to investigate most serious crimes, including crimes against the state, conduct secret surveillance and recruit secret informers. Over the years, its work has been marred by numerous allegations of abusive practices and serious human rights violations, including the use of torture.

In 2019, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed its concern about “Harassment of independent journalists and media workers for critically reporting on State policies and on other matters of public interest, including through [...] prosecutions on allegedly trumped-up charges”, and called on Tajikistan “Ensure the effective protection of independent journalists and media workers against any form of intimidation and refrain from using civil and criminal provisions, including the provisions on extremism, as well as other regulations, as a tool to suppress critical reporting on matters of public interest.”

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Russian, Tajik.

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 25 March 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Daler Sharipov (he/him)