

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST ARRESTED AND REPORTEDLY TORTURED

Tajikistani BBC journalist Urunboy Usmonov is awaiting trial after being charged with participation in the banned Islamic movement *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*. Amnesty International believes that he has been detained due to his journalistic work on *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*. He may have been tortured or ill-treated in detention.

BBC journalist **Urunboy Usmonov**, aged 59, did not return home from work on 13 June. On 14 June he briefly returned to his family's home in the city of Khujand in the northern Soghd region, Tajikistan. He was in the presence of officers of the State Committee on National Security of Tajikistan (SCNS), who had come to search the house. His relatives saw injuries on his neck that they believe he sustained from torture or other forms of ill-treatment in detention. On 15 June he was charged with Article 307.3, part 2, "Participation in a banned extremist organization". He is currently held at a pre-trial detention facility No. 2 in the city of Khujand (SIZO).

On 15 June an Interior Ministry spokesperson was reported as saying that Urunboy Usmonov was suspected of membership of Hizb-ut-Tahrir since 2009, and of conducting extremist propaganda using the internet, distributing the group's literature and recruiting new members. His lawyer, Fayziniso Vohidova, who has participated in all investigative activities since 20 June, told Amnesty International on 2 July that the investigation had found no evidence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir membership. On 6 July SCNS officials told the BBC that he was not accused of Hizb-ut-Tahrir membership, but that the investigation was focusing on his involvement in the organization and on failing to inform the authorities of his contacts with it. Amnesty International is concerned that evidence may be fabricated against him as punishment for his journalistic work and for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Urunboy Usmonov had no access to a lawyer for a week after his arrest. The family instructed his lawyer on 15 June. However, the investigator delayed access to him and she was only able to see him for the first time on 20 June. Since 14 June his family has been able to see him only once for half an hour in the presence of officials. Hamid Ismailov of the BBC Central Asian Service was able to meet with Urunboy Usmonov for ten minutes and reported on 28 June: "I was expecting to see a physically frail man but he was frail mentally and psychologically as well and that was very difficult to see. He was talking to me but his eyes were fixed on the security officers."

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

- Express concern that BBC journalist Urunboy Usmonov was arrested as punishment for his journalistic work and for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urge the authorities to promptly drop all charges related to his work as a journalist and release him;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that Urunboy Usmonov is protected from torture or other ill-treatment and call for a prompt, impartial and independent investigation into allegations that he was tortured or ill-treated in detention and bring those found responsible to justice;
- Express concern that his lawyer was denied access to him before 20 June.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 AUGUST 2011 TO:

The President

Emomali Rahmon
Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki Tajikistan,
Pr. Rudaki, 80,
734023 g. Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Email: mail@president.tj
Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Zarifi Khamrohon
Pr. Rudaki, 42,
734051 Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Fax: (992 37) 221-02-59
Email: info@mfa.tj
Salutation: Dear Minister

Prosecutor General

Sherhon 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.

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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. President Emomali Rakhmon has been in power since 1994. Emomali Rakhmon has been successful in consolidating Tajikistan after its devastating civil war. He 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 criticized human rights violations in the country such as torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officers, impunity for torturers, violence against women; and restrictions of freedom of speech. In recent years independent media outlets and journalists have faced criminal and civil law suits for criticizing the government.

In Tajikistan police have in many cases been accused of torturing or beating detainees. Safeguards against torture enshrined in domestic law are not always adhered to. For example, while the new Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that detainees are entitled to a lawyer from the moment of their arrest, in practice lawyers are at the mercy of investigators who can deny them access for many days. During this period of incommunicado detention, the risk of torture or other ill-treatment is particularly high. Torture practices reported in Tajikistan include the use of electric shocks; attaching plastic bottles filled with water or sand to the detainee's genitals; rape; and burning with cigarettes. Beating with batons, truncheons and sticks, kicking and punching are also believed to be common.

Behrouz Afagh, head of Middle East and West/Central Asia at the BBC World Service wrote on 29 June: "The Urunboy we all know [is cheerful], gentle, generous, tolerant, utterly honest and open minded [...] His essays and novels, and his reporting for the BBC [is] informed by his broad and sophisticated view of the world [...] He would simply be unable to belong to any group which would see the world through a narrow dogmatic ideology."

Name: Urunboy Usmonov
Gender m/f: M

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