

EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue, 11 November 2020

NOVEMBER 2020

Topics: freedoms of expression, assembly and association

INTRODUCTION

This briefing focuses on key concerns in the areas of freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

Weaknesses in Tajikistan's human rights protection have been felt particularly keenly during the COVID-19 pandemic and this briefing highlights relevant key concerns in the different thematic chapters.

The document concludes with a set of key recommendations that International Partnership for Human Rights urges you to raise with the Tajikistani authorities.

For further details on the topics included in this briefing, refer to:

- *The price of Silence vs. the Cost of Speaking Out. Media Freedom in Tajikistan*, IPHR, July 2020
- *Human Rights Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 Response in Tajikistan*, IPHR, September 2020

DETERIORATING FREE SPEECH AND MEDIA CLIMATE

Throughout March and April 2020, the Tajikistani authorities repeatedly denied that the coronavirus had spread to Tajikistan despite media reports and social media accounts indicating that the pandemic was already progressing rapidly across the country. The authorities refused to adopt a transparent approach and rebutted journalists' questions. Instead of following up on reports about the first suspected COVID-19 cases and using the media as a tool to raise awareness and slow the spread of the virus, the authorities warned the bearers of bad news that they would be "held to account". Medical doctors reported being pressured by health officials not to refer suspected COVID-19 cases for testing or to disclose any information about such patients. On 30 April the first cases of COVID-19 infections were officially confirmed but the authorities continued to downplay the situation including reports of dozens of death of patients showing symptoms consistent with COVID-19. A new law on coronavirus reporting adopted in July 2020 has further curtailed freedom of expression.



New legislation on coronavirus reporting curtails freedom of expression

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Tajikistani authorities have reacted aggressively to media reporting about COVID-19. On 24 April 2020, a little less than a week before the first officially confirmed cases were announced, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection criticized journalists for reporting cases of death with COVID-19 like symptoms. It blamed them for “escalating the situation, which leads to conflicts and distrust in the Government and the Ministry”, according to a statement posted on the Ministry’s website. It concluded that “any media outlet, private individual or reporter who publishes incorrect and false information about the coronavirus will be brought to account.”¹

Even after the authorities announced the first officially confirmed infections of coronavirus on 30 April, they continued to blame the media for “spreading panic” among the population because of its COVID-19 reporting.

According to the government news agency Khovar.tj, on 7 May 2020, the press centre of the Prosecutor General’s Office warned that “legal measures will be taken against anybody who sows panic in the country”.² Reportedly, the Office added that rumours about an increased number of deaths associated with COVID-19, price increases, the lack of basic foodstuffs and necessities and the closure of major interregional roads are untruthful.

The number of officially confirmed deaths has been consistently lower than civil society estimates. A website³ registered abroad that records cases of deaths suspected to be associated with COVID-19 has been blocked in Tajikistan since 11 May, just a few days after it was launched.⁴ The website list is based on information submitted by internet users who are, among others, required to provide their personal details as well as information confirming that the deceased was likely to have been infected with the virus, such as the typical symptoms or if burials had been conducted by medical personnel instead of relatives.

Two examples of misinformation by the authorities:

- Despite numerous reports from reliable sources about the death of medical doctors from coronavirus, the Minister of Health of Tajikistan, Jamoliddin Abdullozoda, claimed at a press conference on 24 July 2020 that not a single doctor in the country had died from COVID-19.⁵
- Data from Tajikistan’s Statistical Agency shows an 11 per cent increase in the mortality rate from March to August 2020. The Statistical Agency claims that this is unrelated to the pandemic but admitted that a particularly high number of deaths were due to “*respiratory pathologies or infectious diseases*”.⁶

1 <https://tj.sputniknews.ru/country/20200426/1031133615/minzdrav-tajikistan-obespokoen-lozhnye-novosti-koronavirus-smi.html>

2 <https://khovar.tj/rus/2020/05/vam-ne-okazyvayut-neobhodimuyu-meditsinskuyu-pomoshh-v-aptekah-zavysheny-tseny-na-lekarstva-pozvonite-v-generalnuyu-prokuraturu-tadzhikistana/>

3 <https://kvtj.info>

4 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30606373.html>

5 <https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20200724/ministr-zdravoohraneniya-tadzhikistana-ni-odin-vrach-ne-skonchalsya-v-rezultate-zarazheniya-v-meduchrezhdeniyah-ispravleno>

6 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30757379.html>

On 4 July 2020 President Rahmon signed new legislation⁷ regarding the spread of “false information” about the coronavirus which severely curtails freedom of expression. It came into force on 7 July and punishes journalists, bloggers and civil activists who distribute “inaccurate” and “untruthful” information about the COVID-19 pandemic through the press, social networks “or other electronic means”. Fines range from 580 TJS (approx. 50 EUR) for individuals or administrative arrest for a period of 10 to 15 days to 11 600 TJS (approx. 1000 EUR) for legal entities. The inclusion of “other networks and electronic communication networks” could allow users of platforms such as Telegram, Viber, Instagram to be prosecuted for sharing information which the state deems unreliable, as well as opening the door for state monitoring of internal private correspondence.

Independent journalists and human rights activists are concerned that in practice the only information which will be considered to be accurate and truthful will be that which is approved or issued by state bodies.

According to human rights defenders, there are far fewer discussions about COVID-19 in the media and social media networks and there have been cases of journalists and bloggers who faced reprisals for publishing information questioning the authorities’ policy on COVID-19. Some Tajikistani telegram channels that used to focus on the pandemic stopped publishing information from non-governmental sources. Many people in Tajikistan fear that those wishing to share their experiences of COVID-19 on social media networks may be required to have an official certificate confirming their illness, or risk facing persecution for distributing false information.

Numerous Tajikistani civil society groups, media outlets and journalists had called on the President and the Head of the Upper Chamber of Parliament not to sign or adopt the amendments.⁸

Limited access to information

In Tajikistan journalists and media outlets known for critical reporting frequently encounter obstacles to gaining access to information of public interest. This has been all the more problematic in the face of the current coronavirus pandemic.⁹

Starting in April 2020, reports mounted on social media platforms and by media outlets including *ASIA-Plus*, *Radio Ozodi*, *Sputnik Tadjikistana* and *Akhbor.com* about a spike in deaths in different parts of the country resulting from, as the authorities claimed, pneumonia, tuberculosis and typhoid fever. Until 30

7 Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Amendments and Additions to the Code of Administrative Offenses” amend Article 374 part 1: Dissemination of false information using the media, the Internet or other telecommunication networks.

8 <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/power/20200623/povod-dlya-presledovaniya-emomali-rahmona-i-rustam-emomali-prizvali-ne-prinimat-popravki-k-koap>

9 Article 23 of the Law “On Print-Media and Other Mass Media” stipulates that government agencies are obligated to swiftly provide information on issues of urgent public significance. Government agencies are also required to respond to critical or analytical journalistic materials pertaining to their remit within specific time frames. Should the agency need more time to respond, it has to notify the media outlet/ journalist within three days and specify when the information will be provided (Article 24). In practice authorities often do not adhere to these time frames. Article 23, part 5 of the Law “On Print-Media and Other Mass Media” stipulates that representatives of mass media have the right to lodge a complaint when government agencies fail to provide information. However, no official information is available on whether any government representatives have faced sanctions for not providing information. Civil society activists told IPHR that journalists usually refrain from lodging complaints and that no administrative or criminal case has been opened to punish the failure to respond to a request for information by the media.

April the authorities maintained that the coronavirus had not spread to the country. Although they made available general information about the virus, citizens were left with pressing unanswered questions.

When independent journalists, media outlets or civil society activists made inquiries of the authorities or tried to verify information, state officials usually did not respond or even prevented them from obtaining information.

- **Recent Example *Radio Ozodi*:** In a letter to Sirojiddin Muhridin, the Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, dated 30 March 2020, Jamie Fly, President of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, deplored attempts by the Tajikistani authorities to interfere with the coverage of the coronavirus situation of *Radio Ozodi*, its Tajik Service. “Officials with the Health Ministry, the Anti-Epidemic Commission, and your own ministry have refused to speak with Ozodi correspondents [...] and have excluded them from press briefings.”¹⁰

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Harassment and intimidation of journalists

According to media experts and journalists in Tajikistan and in exile whom IPHR interviewed in 2019 and 2020, it has become virtually impossible to conduct journalistic investigations and publish articles on issues, which the authorities perceive to be “sensitive” without endangering one’s own safety or that of family members. As a result, self-censorship is increasingly common amongst independent media outlets and journalists who work from Tajikistan and some journalists publish materials under pseudonyms to protect themselves and their relatives from reprisals.

- **Most recent publicly reported case of physical attacks:** Abdullo Gurbati (also known as Avazmad Gurbatov), *ASIA-Plus* journalist, was attacked by two unknown men on 11 May 2020 at the Korvon market in Dushanbe. He maintains the attack is connected to his work as a journalist, and in particular to his video reports about Tajikistan’s response to COVID-19. He was again attacked on 29 May by three men in another place, in Uyali Jamoat (Khuroson district). In June, the authorities found the three individuals guilty of petty hooliganism and were fined 580 Tajik Somoni (TJS, the equivalent of approx. 50 EUR). However, according to his lawyer, the preliminary investigation relating to the attack at the Korvon market was suspended due to the failure to identify a perpetrator.¹¹

Journalists and bloggers who write reports that are critical of government policies and officials risk having criminal investigations opened against them. According to journalists, officials frequently threaten them with criminal charges if they do not comply with demands such as refraining from covering certain issues.

The authorities have brought charges and threatened bringing charges against journalists and bloggers such as those articles of the Criminal Code punishing “defamation and insult”, “incitement to discord”, and “counter-terrorism and extremism”. As the broad and imprecise wording of what constitutes

10 <https://pressroom.rferl.org/a/rferl-president-jamie-fly-letter-to-tajik-minister-of-foreign-affairs-sirojiddin-muhriddin/30520646.html>

11 <https://ihahr-nis.org/sledstvie-o-napadenii-na-gurbati-priostanovleno>

“terrorism”, “terrorist action”, “extremism”, “extremist activities” and “extremist materials” grants overly wide discretion to authorities in the interpretation and application of these provisions, journalists and bloggers are often criminally punished for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

On 14 October 2020 the Lower House of Parliament unanimously supported amendments to the Administrative Code of Tajikistan which provide for administrative punishment for actions aimed at “incitement of national, racial, local or religious enmity or discord”, “humiliation of national dignity”, as well as “propaganda of exclusivity of citizens according to their religion, national, racial or local affiliation”. If these actions are committed publicly or using mass media, they are punishable by a fine of up to the equivalent of approximately 480 EUR or administrative arrest of up to 10 days. For a repeat offence, persons can face criminal prosecution for “incitement” (Article 189 of the Criminal Code).

- **Recent case:** imprisoned journalist Daler Sharipov. Independent journalist Daler Sharipov, who frequently wrote about controversial issues such as human rights and religion and has criticised government policies in these areas, was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment on 16 April 2020 for “inciting religious hatred” under Article 189, part 1 of the Criminal Code. Many civil society groups have since called for his release from prison. Further information about the case can be found [here](#).

Withholding press licences and media accreditation

Licensing requirements for radio and TV broadcasters and accreditation of journalists working for foreign media outlets provide many opportunities for the authorities to put pressure on journalists and media outlets and discourage critical reporting. What is more, the website of the State Committee on Television and Radio Licensing does not provide information about how to obtain licences, making it difficult for applicants to follow the correct procedure. Since 2017 no new print-media has been able to register with the Ministry of Justice. Under Article 30 of the Media Law of Tajikistan, accreditation entails aspects of “authorisation” or “permission”, which contradicts international standards.

- **Recent Example:** In early August 2020, the Tajikistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to extend the accreditation of Anushervon Aripov, a journalist from the TV channel “*Nastoyashee Vremya*” (Current Time), a Russian-language TV broadcaster operated by Prague-based RFE/RL in cooperation with *Voice of America*. The Tajikistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs had criticised a television report by Aripov on President Rahmon’s premature start of the election campaign, shortly afterwards it announced that his accreditation had not been renewed.¹²

Human rights defenders and media experts report that the current “Regulation on Accreditation of Foreign Media Correspondents in Tajikistan” is outdated and refers to the provisions of the old Media Law. Journalists’ organizations have called on the Tajikistani authorities to review this document and bring it into line with international obligations and national legislative norms.¹³

Since the approval of amendments to the Law “On the Election of the President of Tajikistan” in 2018, local journalists require additional accreditation (in the form of a certificate) from the Central Election Committee in order to cover the elections, several journalists were prevented from covering the election process in 2020.

12 <https://rsf.org/en/news/journalist-loses-accreditation-over-report-about-tajikistans-president>

13 <https://rsf.org/en/news/journalist-loses-accreditation-over-report-about-tajikistans-president>

- **Recent Example:** In August 2020, journalists of the *Asia-Plus* media group were denied such accreditation.¹⁴ *Radio Ozodi* tried to register 15 of their journalists but received only nine permits.

Blocking online content and internet access

The government continues to block (and in some cases disable) websites of independent media outlets and political opposition groups, social media platforms and internet messengers. This and the temporary blocking of internet access are part of the authorities' strategies to silence critical voices.

A new law "On counteracting Extremism" signed by the President in January 2020 granted the authorities wide-ranging powers to control all websites and social networks and restrict users to access them if deemed necessary. This means that the Government Communication Service together with the State Committee for National Security or another law enforcement agency has the right to immediately block any websites or social networks without a court decision, if it considers them "extremist".

- At the time of writing the sites of *Avesto*, *Radio Ozodi*, *Faraj* and *Wordpress* are fully blocked in Tajikistan.
- The media site *Akhbor.com*, run by former *RFE/RL* journalist Mirzo Salimpur from Prague, as well as exile media sites affiliated with the banned opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) such as *Payom.net* and *Tajinfo.org* are permanently blocked in Tajikistan and only accessible inside the country via VPN.
- In early 2020 all independent and privately-owned TV and radio outlets in Tajikistan were ordered to inform the authorities about their planned broadcasts each week, in a move seen as a consequence of the new Law "On counteracting Extremism".
- On 18 February 2020 the Supreme Court ruled to block the independent news outlet *Akhbor* after concluding that it offers a platform to "terrorists and extremists". Journalists cooperating with *Akhbor* could now face criminal charges and be equated to militants or members of a banned organization.¹⁵

POLITICAL OPPONENTS TARGETED

Since 2015, the Tajikistani authorities have prosecuted activists and alleged members of banned parties and groups and the crack down on political opponents continued. There are currently 17 organizations and parties are recognized as terrorist and extremist. Among them are the IRPT and the Tajikistani opposition Group 24.

- On 12 June 2020, the Supreme Court sentenced Hizbullo Shovalizoda, a member of the banned IRPT, to 20 years in prison.¹⁶ The case was heard behind closed doors and Shovalizoda's relatives were informed about the verdict by phone. On 5 May 2020, the Prosecutor General's Office publicly stated that Hizbullo Shovalizoda had been extradited from Vienna to Dushanbe with the assistance of the Austrian authorities. Shovalizoda was convicted of "participation in the activities of an extremist organization" (Article 307 part three of the Criminal Code of Tajikistan) and "treason" (Article 305).

14 <https://newreporter.org/2020/10/09/zhurnalistam-v-tadzhikistane-meshayut-rabotat-cho-to-delat/>

15 <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-court-says-news-website-serves-as-platform-for-terrorists>

16 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30716581.html>,

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000118749057/oesterreich-soll-abgeschobenen-tadschiken-wieder-zurueckholen>.

Shovalizoda had arrived in Austria in 2019 and applied for asylum, but his request was refused. On 22 January 2020 the Austrian authorities detained him and on 4 March he was extradited to Tajikistan, despite protests from the Tajikistani opposition in exile. However, on 7 July, the Austrian Federal Administrative Court ruled that the refusal of asylum and Shovalizoda's expulsion from the country were illegal. The Court found that the asylum authorities had ignored information from the public prosecutor's office in the town of Eisenstadt that had turned down an extradition request from the Tajikistani authorities to extradite Shovalizoda on the grounds that the application from Tajikistan was predominantly political in nature. Furthermore, the Court found that the asylum authorities had relied on outdated information about the situation in Tajikistan when deciding on the expulsion.

- In early November 2020 Dushanbe City Court found Saidmuhammad Saidkiyomiddin guilty of treason (Article 305 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced him to 13 years' imprisonment in a closed trial. According to a source cited by *Radio Ozodi*,¹⁷ he was accused of supporting the interests of the government of Iran by helping two Tajikistani students obtain Iranian visas. According to his family, Saidmuhammad Saidkiyomiddin suffers from diabetes and requires regular medication. His father, Said Kiyomiddin Gozi, an Islamic preacher and prominent member of the Islamic opposition, was imprisoned for "inciting national, racial, ethnic and religious enmity" in 2017 and was killed in May 2019 during a riot in Vakhdat prison colony.
- There have also been cases where opposition activists have voluntarily returned to Tajikistan on the basis of alleged amnesties.¹⁸ Thus, on 20 February 2020, Sobir Valiev, a former member of Group 24 and deputy head of the Congress of Constructive Forces of Tajikistan, stated on his Facebook page that he was acquitted of all charges and amnestied by the Tajikistani authorities. Previously, Valiev had been accused of publicly calling for extremist activities (Article 307, part 1 of the Criminal Code) and of organizing an extremist group (Article 307, part 2).¹⁹

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 17 May 2020, flood-affected residents of the Khuroson district in the southern Khatlon region blocked the Bokhtar-Dushanbe road for several hours to protest against the government's failure to provide rapid and efficient disaster relief and to draw the authorities' attention to their difficult situation.²⁰ The disaster occurred on the night of 14 May, when a powerful mudslide descended on several villages in the Khuroson region, flooding dozens of residential buildings. Two people were killed in the mudslides, houses were destroyed, and the region's agriculture and infrastructure were damaged. Residents claimed that only after this protest did the head of Khatlon region and the deputy prime minister visit the site and assess the situation.²¹

After the protest the authorities of Khuroson reportedly warned local residents that participating in new protests would entail the "harsh suppression of the actions of provocateurs." The Khatlon Regional Prosecutor's Office subsequently opened a criminal case against six Khuroson residents for allegedly "inciting mass protests" and "violating public order".²²

17 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30928007.html>

18 <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20200221/amnestied-former-member-of-group-24-returns-to-tajikistan>

19 <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20200221/amnestied-former-member-of-group-24-returns-to-tajikistan>

20 <http://www.dialog.tj/news/uslyshte-nas-zhiteli-postradavshego-ot-stikhii-khurosona-ustroili-aktsiyu-protesta>

21 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30695110.html>

22 <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20200609/shesterih-zhitelei-hurosona-obvinili-v-prizivah-k-massovim-protestam?>

On 20 May 2020 Chinese workers of the “Tajikistani-Chinese Mining Company” went on strike in the town of Zarnisor in the northern Sughd region of Tajikistan. According to independent *Akhbor* news, the workers had told *Spaces of the East* (a Chinese website) that for about eight months they had not received their salary, and because of the spread of COVID-19, they wanted to return to their homeland. Several days before, a colleague from the Chinese Henan province had died. The authorities had claimed that he had died of gastrointestinal disease, but Chinese workers believed that he suffered from COVID-19. They also expressed concern that several other colleagues were infected with the coronavirus but were not provided with adequate medication and treatment.²³

The protests were broken up by police. A spokesman from the Sughd Ministry of Internal Affairs told *Radio Ozodi* that “the policemen who arrived at the scene shot into the air to calm the rioters, with no casualties or injuries”. According to the police, some protesters had smashed glass doors and windows of the company building during the protests.²⁴

However, Chinese workers told the website *Spaces of the East* that “police officers had beaten them with batons, and that some protesters were seriously injured”. The Tajikistani Ministry of Internal Affairs has not issued any further comments on the incident.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

In January 2020 the Ministry of Justice announced that more than 2500 public associations operate in the country.²⁵ Additionally, in accordance with the Law “On Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs”, 232 other forms of non-profit organizations are registered: 194 associations, 14 public funds, 24 non-profit organizations.

Throughout 2020, inspections and prosecutions of NGOs by various state bodies, including the Ministry of Justice, the State Tax Committee and the Labour Inspectorate, continued. The authorities often do not provide advice on compliance with the rules but instead look for the smallest - mostly technical - errors in order to subsequently impose high fines or the closure of the NGO concerned. Inspections have also been initiated in relation to those organizations that are most actively involved in protecting human rights, as well as activities aimed at protecting vulnerable or marginalized groups.

- **Recent Example:** In June 2020, Ismoili Somoni District Court of Dushanbe suspended the activities of the Zerkalo Centre for Sociological Research for two months at the request of the Ministry of Justice.²⁶ The Ministry of Justice accused the Centre of violating registration procedures for employees. The head of the research centre, Kahramon Bakozoda, told *Radio Ozodi* that it is up to the court to decide whether the organisation can resume its activities.

Another burden for NGOs is the sometimes unclear and excessive financial reporting requirements. In accordance with the Law “On Public Associations”, in addition to annual financial reports, public associations must provide detailed information on the type and source of financing, the project for which it is intended, and the beneficiaries and partners involved in the project. There is no system for the provision of online submissions, which is a serious problem for public associations located in remote and inaccessible regions of the country.

23 <https://akhbor-rus.com/-p4537-174.htm>

24 <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajik-police-use-firearms-to-break-up-protest-by-chinese-workers/30628915.html>

25 <https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/20120119/2500-public-associations-now-function-tajikistan>

26 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30723651.html>

The legislation does not define penalties for failing to notify the Ministry or missing deadlines. In practice, the Ministry of Justice requires public associations to pay a fine for untimely notification, in accordance with Article 475 of the Administrative Code, although this Article pertains to “committing actions that go beyond the goals and objectives defined by the charters of public organizations”. The fines under this article range from from 5800 to 11 600 TJS (approximately 474 to 949 EUR).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AUTHORITIES OF TAJIKISTAN

We have identified the following recommendations as particularly pressing and timely:

Free speech and media climate

- Lift undue restrictions on freedom of expression and ensure that media outlets and journalists can operate free from excessive state interference. This recommendation is in line with Recommendation 48d of the UN Human Rights Committee’s Concluding Observations issued in August 2019.
- Protect journalists reporting critically on state policies against intimidation and harassment, including pressure on their families and ensure that they are not prosecuted in retaliation for their work.
- Review its current laws and regulations on accreditation (Media Law, Article 30 and Regulation on Accreditation of Foreign Media Correspondents in Tajikistan) in accordance with international obligations and ensure that the criteria and guarantees of accreditation are clear, including the possibility to appeal refusals to provide accreditation.
- Ensure that licencing and accreditation requirements for media outlets are not misused to punish media outlets for reporting that is critical or perceived as critical of the authorities or governmental policies.
- Abolish the requirement for print-media to obtain permission from the State Committee for National Security in order to register with the Ministry of Culture.
- Put an end to the practice of arbitrarily blocking access to websites; and ensure that no one is penalized for exercising their right to freedom of expression in legitimate ways online.
- Safeguard the right to have access to information of public interest, including by addressing any practical or administrative obstacles in processing requests for such information and ensuring timely responses to requests. This recommendation is in line with Recommendation 48g of the UN Human Rights Committee’s Concluding Observations issued in August 2019.
- In accordance with Recommendation 24 of the UN Human Rights Committee’s Concluding Observations, bring regulations and practices governing states of emergency, as well as provisions on the “public justification” of terrorism or extremism activity into compliance with international standards.

Civil society

- Ensure that human rights NGOs, defenders and lawyers are not subjected to pressure by state bodies or officials because of their work and that they can carry out their work without fear of reprisals.

- Ensure that inspections of NGOs carried out by state bodies do not result in undue interference into the activities of the organizations targeted and that NGOs do not face unfounded, disproportionate and excessive penalties, such as harsh fines or suspension or closure because of alleged violations of a technical nature.
- Promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigate all allegations of intimidation, harassment and other violations of the rights of NGO representatives and individuals with whom they work and hold those responsible accountable.
- Bring existing legislation relating to NGOs into line with international standards and ensure that NGOs are consulted and granted the opportunity to influence draft legislation affecting them prior to its adoption.
- Carry out effective investigations into cases of police violence during the strike of the Chinese workers on 20 May in Zarnisor to establish responsibility and punish the officers responsible, in line with the relevant international standards.