

## **Tajikistan: Politically motivated trials of human rights defenders and journalists begin - behind closed doors**

*3 October 2022*

The trials of several human rights defenders and journalists, who have been charged with various criminal offenses in apparent retaliation for their criticism of the government's repressive policies in the restive Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), recently began in Tajikistan. International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) are seriously concerned about the non-transparent and politically motivated nature of these proceedings and call on the Tajikistani authorities to drop the charges against the defenders and journalists and immediately and unconditionally release them.

The trial of human rights lawyer and director of the Pamir's Lawyers Association Manuchehr Kholiknazarov and other activists, including Faromuz Irgashev, Muzaffar Muborakshoev, Khushom Gulyam (Khushruz Jumaev) and Khursand Mamadshoev, who are members of Commission 44 - a government-civil society commission established in November 2021 to investigate the killing of protester Gulbiddin Ziyobekov and the subsequent crackdown on mass protests in GBAO - began on 20 September 2022 behind closed doors at the Supreme Court in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.

The trial in the case of independent journalist Abdullo Gurbati began a day later, on 21 September at the Shohmansur District Court in Tajikistan. On 15 September the investigation into the case of journalist Daler Imomali was also completed and his case will be submitted to court [in the near future](#). The closed trial against independent journalist and human rights defender Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva is ongoing at a detention facility of the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) in Dushanbe.

These and other human rights defenders and journalists were all arrested as part of the widening crackdown on dissenting voices and civil society launched by the Tajikistani government in response to mass protests, which took place in GBAO in November 2021 and May 2022. They have spoken out about allegations of serious human rights violations characterising the government's so-called 'special' or 'anti-terrorist' operations in the region, including reports of the disproportionate use of force against mostly unarmed civilians, extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions and repressive measures targeting civil society and the wider population of GBAO. When prosecuting the defenders and journalists, the authorities have used vaguely worded criminal legislation on "extremism" and other offences, which can be used to stifle

dissent. IPHR and OMCT are furthermore concerned about the lack of access to lawyers, and the closed nature of the trials, alleged ill-treatment and torture.

### **Currently on trial are:**

#### **Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, independent journalist and human rights activist:**

[Mamadshoeva's trial](#) is taking place behind closed doors at the SCNS pre-trial detention centre in Dushanbe. The case, which has been classified, was investigated by officials from the Prosecutor General's Office and the SCNS, with the prosecution reportedly [demanding](#) 25 years of imprisonment.

Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva was arrested on 18 May 2022 and accused of organising unrest in Khorog. She was charged with publicly calling for violent overthrow of the constitutional order and Tajikistani state TV broadcast a video showing her “confessing” to organising the GBAO protests. We are concerned that Mamadshoeva was forced to testify against herself and incriminate others.

**Manuchehr Kholiknazarov** (human rights lawyer and director of the Pamir's Lawyers Association, member of NGO Coalition against Torture in Tajikistan), **Faromuz Irgashov** (lawyer and unregistered candidate for the 2020 presidential election in Tajikistan), **Khursand Mamadshoev**, (brother of detained journalist Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva), and **Muzaffar Muborakshoev** (a civil society activist from GBAO): Their trial, which reportedly included many other GBAO activists, started on 20 September behind closed doors at the Supreme Court in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. They have been allegedly charged with participation in an extremist group.

On 28 May 2022 at least 13 members of Commission 44 - including Manuchehr Kholiknazarov, were detained and interrogated by security services in GBAO, as government officials attempt to link their human right work to spurious allegations that they were involved in establishing “extremist groups”. While some civil activists were released, Manuchehr Kholiknazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Khursand Mamadshoev and Muzaffar Muborakshoev, remained in detention. In June, seven of thirteen members of Commission 44 were transferred to the detention centre of the State Committee for National Security in Dushanbe.

#### **Abdullo Gurbati, journalist:**

Additionally, at least four independent journalists are currently behind bars including **Abdullo Gurbati and Daler Imomali** who were detained on 15 June 2022 in Dushanbe. While both have been charged under article 307 (3) of the Criminal Code (“Participation in the activities of banned political parties, public and religious associations”), Daler Imomali has also been charged under article 259, part 1 (“Illegal entrepreneurship”) and 346, part 2, item "A" (“Deliberately false denunciation”). Gurbati has also been charged under article 328 of the Criminal Code. On 21 September, Gurbati's trial began behind closed doors. On 29 September, the journalist was charged with committing crimes of violence against a state official (article 328 part 1; insult of a

state official (article 330 part 1) and Article 307 (3) of the Criminal Code). The prosecutor asked the court to find Gurbati guilty and sentence him to eight years' imprisonment.

The other two journalists, **Zavkibek Saidamini** and **Abdusattor Pirmukhammadzoda**, who called for the release of Imomali and Ghurbatov, were detained in July 2022. Saidamini was accused of collaborating with the banned Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and Group 24 and Pirmukhammadzoda of alleged disobedience against the police and publicly calling for extremist activities. The investigation into the charges against them is ongoing at the time of writing.

From June to September 2022 several members of the Commission were sentenced to various prison terms, including [Khudjamri Pirnazarov and Shaftolu Bekdavlatov](#), who were sentenced to 18 years in prison for organising an unsanctioned demonstration, and poet **Muyassar Sadonshoev** who was sentenced to 11 years for cooperating and publishing the videos of sessions of Commission 44 online.

#### **We call on the Tajikistani authorities to:**

- Immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders, human rights lawyers and journalists who have been charged, arrested and imprisoned solely for carrying out their professional activities.
- In particular, release journalists Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, Abdullo Gurbati, Daler Imomali, [Zavkibek Saidamini](#), [Abdusattor Pirmukhammadzoda](#) and Khushruz Jumayev, as well as human rights lawyers Manuchehr Kholiknazarov and Faromuz Irgashov and drop all charges against them and ensure their physical and psychological well-being.
- Cease the practice of criminal prosecution, intimidation and detention of the civil society activists, journalists and bloggers in the country and ensure the respect of the fundamental rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly in practice.
- Ensure transparent, effective and independent investigations into the November 2021 and May 2022 events, the circumstances of the deaths of victims of these events, and all allegations of human rights violations related to the events, including allegations of the excessive use of force by the authorities in response to the protests and unrest, and allegations of torture and ill-treatment both in custody and extra-custodially.
- Ensure that investigations are carried out with the participation of both national and international experts, including civil society.
- Make the findings of the investigation public and act upon them to provide redress for victims and hold those responsible to account in fair trial proceedings.
- Cease putting pressure on independent lawyers, human right defenders and journalists trying to cover the GBAO events.