



Uzbekistan: overturn the unfounded criminal sentence against blogger Otabek Sattoriy and release him

The authorities of Uzbekistan should **overturn the sentence passed against blogger Otabek Sattoriy and release him from prison**, Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) said today.

On 30 March 2023, independent blogger Otabek Sattoriy is facing a court hearing in Navoi, where he is currently serving a prison sentence, concerning an incident on 10 March 2023 in which he allegedly violated prison rules¹ by queuing with other prisoners for food in the canteen instead of taking his food separately (as he has special dietary requirements). He received an official warning and tomorrow, the court will rule on whether Sattoriy infringed prison rules and decide on the next steps. IPHR and AHRCA believe this is a new attempt to put pressure on the blogger and his family.

Previously, on 10 May 2021, Muzrabad District Court in the Sukhodarya region sentenced Sattoriy to six and half years in prison after finding him guilty under one count of slander (article 139 of the Criminal Code) and four of extortion (article 165 of the Criminal Code). He appealed the ruling but in July 2021 Samarkand Regional Criminal Court dismissed the appeal. The Supreme Court of Uzbekistan subsequently rejected Sattoriy's cassation complaint and upheld his sentence in April 2022. His lawyers tried twice to appeal against the Supreme Court's decision, but without success.

Sattoriy has been serving his sentence in prison colony No. 4 near the city of Navoi since 28 July 2021.

There are credible allegations that the criminal case against Sattoriy was fabricated to punish him for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [recently called](#) for Sattoriy's immediate release after concluding that "the basis for the arrest and subsequent detention of Mr. Sattoriy was in fact his exercise of freedom of expression."

An independent blogger, Sattoriy is known for speaking out about corruption. Prior to his arrest he had repeatedly criticized and accused representatives of local authorities in the Surkhandarya region of corruption, including the former mayor (*hokim*) and other officials²,

¹ Decree №174 of 29.12.2012, <https://lex.uz/acts/2216121>

² Tura Bobolov was the former hokim of the Surkhandarya region; Хоким Сурхандарьинской области Тура Боболов покинул пост 24 декабря 2022 года, причина не указывается.
<https://kun.uz/ru/news/2022/12/26/tura-bobolov-osvobojden-ot-doljnosti-xokima-surxandarinskoy-oblasti?ysclid=lejijcees9360790335>

on social media and in YouTube³ videos under the name of "Halk Fikri" - "People's Opinion".
⁴ As his posts drew the attention of the general public, he began to receive death threats from unknown people warning him to stop blogging.

On 30 January 2021 plainclothes police officers detained the blogger near his house and on 1 February 2021, Termez City Criminal Court remanded him in custody. He was accused of extorting a new mobile phone from the director of the local Sherabad bazaar in December 2020 by threatening him to publish information about shortcomings at the bazaar unless he gave him the phone.

During the trial Sattoriy stated that he had gone to the bazaar in December 2020 together with a journalist of the media outlet effekt.uz to report about food prices after President Mirziyoyev had promised that there would be no price hike ahead of the New Year festivities. Two men who introduced themselves as employees of the bazaar reportedly told Sattoriy that it was not allowed to take photos at the bazaar. After a verbal fight the men reportedly grabbed Sattoriy's mobile phone and damaged his jacket.

According to one of Sattoriy's former lawyers Umidbek Davlatov⁵, the blogger then filed a complaint with the district authorities. Sattoriy's lawyer and a fellow journalist both stated that the director of the bazaar subsequently offered Sattoriy to compensate him by replacing the damaged phone with a new one.

Prior to his detention on 30 January 2021, the director of the bazaar reportedly called Sattoriy, and they agreed to meet near the blogger's house. However, as soon as the director gave him the new phone in the car and Sattoriy was walking away, plainclothes police officers approached and detained him at the gate of the house. His family was not told where he was. At 9 p.m. that evening the house where Sattoriy lived with his parents was searched by several dozen officials. Sattoriy's family were informed of his whereabouts only two days later.

He was charged with extortion in connection with the phone and shortly afterwards additional charges of slander and extortion were brought against him based on complaints filed by individuals whom Sattoriy had accused of corruption in his blogs.

During the first seven days of his detention, nine victim complaints were allegedly lodged against Sattoriy, although not one had been registered before he was arrested. Later, those who lodged complaints against Sattoriy admitted that they were put under pressure to make these false statements.

There are also credible reports that Sattoriy was subjected to torture and ill-treatment during pre-trial detention from 30 January to 11 March 2021 at Termez Police Station. He was not allowed family visits, nor to receive parcels of food, clothes or medicines.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpgE1ePcdCDhEe10p4Zb3yA>

⁴ https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%91%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2_%D0%A2%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B0_%D0%90%D0%B1%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87

⁵ Umidbek Davlatov has already passed away in the meantime.

He suffered from headaches, cystitis, kidney infections, high fever and convulsions, exacerbating his asthma and allergies. He caught Covid-19 but his relatives were not allowed to pass him medicines.

Sattoriy was threatened during questioning. The head of Termez City Polic department reportedly told him “You’ll be behind bars for the rest of your life”. His first state-appointed lawyer who represented Sattoriy 31 January to 1 March 2021 failed to take action to protect Sattoriy and was close to the police investigators. Sattoriy was not allowed a lawyer of his own choosing at this point.

From 31 January 2021 until the end of the year, Sattoriy’s family came under pressure from law enforcement officials: including surveillance; being followed; cars parked outside the house.

According to Sattoriy’s supporters, it transpired during the trial that the director of the bazaar had kept the bazaar running although the tax authorities had ordered it to close down. This was apparently why no filming was allowed in the bazaar and employees reacted aggressively when Sattoriy and the journalist – who were not aware of this background – started taking photos.

The circumstances of the case clearly suggest that case against Sattoriy was fabricated in retaliation for his independent blogging on corruption related issues. His case also fits into a broader pattern, in which independent journalists and bloggers repeatedly have been detained and criminally prosecuted in Uzbekistan after raising issues that are inconvenient to those in power.

IPHR and AHRCA call on the Uzbekistani authorities to put an end to the persecution of Otabek Sattoriy and to promptly release him in accordance with the decision issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on his case. In order to prove the genuine nature of their commitment to human rights reform, the authorities must safeguard freedom of expression, including on social media platforms in accordance with its international human rights obligations. As long as Sattoriy remains behind bars, the authorities must ensure that he has access to adequate medical assistance for his health problems and protect him from abusive treatment.