



11 September 2017

Business meeting 1. Main freedoms I, including:

- freedom of expression, freedom of media and information

According to article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression..."

Also, according to article 19 of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),

*"1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
 2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."*

Tajikistan is among the states that have joined the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1999. This contract is a statutory international treaty and it is an obligation for all State Parties to follow its principles.

Nevertheless, in Tajikistan the above-mentioned right to freedom of expression of opinions is absolutely violated. There is no platform for public expression of opinions in the country, national media is controlled by the government. Non-state information sources are trying to keep society informed about the situations occurring in the country, however, these agents are often subject to tough pressure and the authorities create conditions in which their activities become impossible. It is almost impossible for independent mass media to obtain any information from the state bodies of Tajikistan. The only possible authorized source of information from the state controlled by the National information agency called "Khovar", which's activities are completely controlled by the state. Moreover, in order to control the activities of the media, the government adopted a rule requiring all media outlets to get consent of the national Agency for their publications.

Censorship in print and electronic media is carried out by both State Committee for National Security (GKNB) and by the Ministry of Culture. The conditions for the registration of newly-minted media have deteriorated significantly. The body of registration of the media outlets requires a certificate from the State National Security Committee. GKNB is also entitled to authorize or prohibit import of printing equipment.

One of the eminent examples of violations of the freedom of media in 2016 was a forced termination of the activities of socio-political publication called "Nigoh" (Vision), which has been publishing weekly in Tajikistan for 10 years, from 2006 to 2016. One of the reasons for closing this independent publication was a simple spelling mistake that has occurred in the word "president", which the publishers admitted in one of their publications. However, the Prosecutor General's Office in Tajikistan accused the

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publication for provoking ethnocentrism, religious conflicts and extremism. According to the statement published in "Nigoh", there were no debts or violations of the tax rules by the publishing company.

According to the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) and Media Council of Republic of Tajikistan, the editorial policy of the newspaper "Nigoh" did not satisfy some officials and the government agencies of Tajikistan. There are some records of the attempts to threaten journalists of the publication with persecution for their professional activities, as well as some interference in the function of the editorial office of "Nigoh".

Following the shutdown of the news outlet "Nigoh", the independent news agency TojNews also has stopped its activities for the same reasons.

According to the article published on the "Reporters Without Borders" (RBG) on April 26, 2017, Tajikistan takes the 149th place in the "Press Freedom Index". The experts of RBG says "in Tajikistan, interrogation by the national security officers, intimidation and blackmailing became part of the daily life for the independent journalists. Tajik authorities are constantly blocking social networks and information websites."

The population of the country is immensely intimidated by the government that people often whisper to each-other in order to avoid problems. Typical gatherings are regarded as extremism by the authorities. Having a conversation over tea in the teahouses is a cultural and traditional practice in Central Asia, however, people are refusing such gatherings as it usually ends with being taken away to the police departments and inevitable detention. There is a constant violation of basic human rights such as the freedom of speech. People completely forgot about their sense of freedom. The authorities suppress any word about the freedom of thought, prisons are crowded, people are intimidated, they detain people for their civil rights, start unfair trials and hold them criminally responsible.

On behalf of Human Rights Vision Foundation, we urge the government of Tajikistan not to restrict the activities of independent media, stop harassment and intimidation of independent journalists for their professional activities, provide an opportunity for the population of the country without fear, allow access to alternative sources of information, and fulfill the obligations before the international legal contracts regarding freedom of speech.

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