

20 September 2017

OSCE HDIM**Tajikistan's Political Prisoners: Unfair Trials, Denial of Legal Rights, Torture, Harassment, Denial of Basic Prisoners' Right**

Dear Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

The political prisoners' issue in Tajikistan is not anymore new, and this is the second time when the civil society activists raise this topic on the annual human rights and democracy conferences of the OSCE. Even though the Tajik authorities have constantly denied that there is no so called political prisoners' phenomenon in the country, but it is in reality an indispensable issue. Every national and international independent human rights organizations, experts and media groups confirm such an actual phenomenon.

Although a series of unlawful arrests of the IRPT's activists has been a subject of discussion after September 2015, there were other political activists previously imprisoned. It's enough to remind some of them as Muhammadruzi Iskandarov (the Head of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan), Zayd Saidov (Leader of "New Tajikistan" Party), Shuhrat Qudratov (Lawyer and deputy chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan) and many others whose cases have had political background. These people were the opponents of the government's (President's) political party, though they had very moderate and constructive positions.

However, the situation became more tragic after September 2015 when the government has used crushing "coupe" of General Nazarzoda and war on terror as a pretext to brutally oppress and imprison dozens of the IRPT members. Not only leaders and leading party members were arrested, rather their lawyers Buzurgmehr Yorov and Nuriddin Mahkhamov were also sentenced to long-term political imprisonment on the basis on false charges. Several lawyers and journalists, who wanted to provide legal assistance to them or to prepare analytical reports on this case, were forced to leave the country. As arrest of the lawyers and journalists, like Hikmatullo Saifullozoda (chief-in-editor of weekly magazine "Najot"), Zubaidullo Roziq and Abdulqahhor Davlatov (both former chief-in-editors of "Najot") has caused widespread fear among lawyers and no one dared to provide legal assistance to them or report on this issue. Perhaps Tajikistan is not the only country having political prisoners; however, it is one of the rare countries, where no one dares to publicly discuss or report it and the lawyers do not want to

represent them. With creating an atmosphere of fear among the people, the Tajik Government has established a full range of self-censorship which has led to very limited information on conditions of political prisoners, their health and legal problems.

While some influential international organizations on human rights have often released statement on this issue, unfortunately the situations of Central Asian region, interests of the countries, regional and international blocks in general resulted in silence and neglect of such a tragic situation in international community. Nevertheless, special reports of some international human rights organizations as well as similar conferences like OSCE/ODIHR HDIM are the only chances and places, where the humanitarian crisis in our country can be shared and discussed. Silence of the international community, atmosphere of fear and panic inside the country and lack of the effective mechanisms to provide support and assistance to political prisoners, have given the government more power to continue its unjust policies.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is worthy to note that, in addition to the issue of political prisoners, we have in Tajikistan another phenomenon known as “political hostages” and it is increasing day by day. The government uses the family members of the activists at home as hostages and human shields in order to force dissents and opposition activists in exile to stop their activities. These family members (political hostages) aren't only allowed to leave the country; they haven't also the right to visit their relatives abroad and haven't even the access to contact them. As an argument, I can give you an example of my own family. Today two of my daughters-in-law and grandchildren are under strict conditions as they are not allowed to go abroad. Moreover, they have no access to use internet or phone-calls to contact their husbands. They have been constantly interrogated and repressed by authorities. Our minimum activities abroad lead to their detention and harsh interrogation by local security committee and police, or through a group of trained provocateurs illegally invade into their homes. It is totally prohibited for them to get a small financial support from their relatives who live abroad, while their children suffer from the hardships of life. The only way they can communicate with us is when the security officials force them to tell us the pressures and the threats they receive, and ask us to stop criticizing the government abroad. Three days before I could reach this meeting, representatives of the National Security Committee have invited my older brother Safarali Kabirov and threatened him with imprisonment, and asked him to convince me and his son - Muhammadjon Kabirov,

another activist, not to participate and speak in this conference. Otherwise, he will bear most severe punishment.

This is a clear example of my personal case – one of the few examples of everyday life in our country which is hidden from eyes of the international community. Previously, the government has used this tactic against some political activists and succeeded to silence some of them and now it wants to implement this policy (political hostages) to all activists.

More silence and passive action of international community on prevention of such cowardly phenomenon will boost it and lead to persecutions and tortures of hundreds of innocent citizens, including children, women and elders. Otherwise, the government will succeed in silencing the voice of civil society, opposition and journalists.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

We hope this meeting will contribute to pay more attention to the life of hundreds and even thousands of innocent people who are being persecuted due to their political beliefs, or due to their relatives' political activities they have been taken as hostages by the government. Furthermore, we hope that OSCE and other international organizations will decisively call on Tajik authorities to fully enforce law and to fulfill its OSCE and other international responsibilities. It is also essential that the organization like OSCE should urge all its member states to respect their obligations on human rights protection, political freedom, religious and cultural sovereignty.

It is obvious that some participant countries not only prepare themselves to follow their own legislations and international commitments, besides they try to put pressure on international organizations so that they close their eyes on violations of human rights and injustices. Unfortunately, these pressures have negatively influenced for past years so that international organizations now pay less attention to problems of citizens. This leads to a worsening of human rights situation in the region and people's disappointment on mechanisms and peaceful political processes, which has a negative impact on regional stability.

Thank you for your attention!

Muhiddin KABIRI,
Chairman, IRPT
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