

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST JAILED AND AT RISK OF TORTURE

Independent journalist, Daler Sharipov, was arrested on 28 January. He is being held in pre-trial detention in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, on trumped up charges of "inciting religious discord". Daler Sharipov is being denied access to his lawyer and is at risk of torture. He is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon

Executive Office of the President

Prospect Rudaki, 80

Dushanbe 734001

Republic of Tajikistan

Please use online form:

(EN) <http://www.president.tj/en>

(RU) <http://www.president.tj/ru>

Twitter: @EmomaliRahmon

Dear Mr President,

On 28 January well-known independent journalist, **Daler Sharipov**, was detained by State Committee for National Security (SCNS) officers for allegedly "inciting religious discord", under Article 189 of the Criminal Code. Many of Daler Sharipov's publications have been critical of the government, and throughout his career he has covered various matters of public interest, including human rights violations and religious freedom.

On 30 January Daler Sharipov appeared at Ismoili Somoni District Court in Dushanbe. The court ruled that he be placed in pre-trial detention for two months. On 1 February the Prosecutor General's Office issued a statement accusing Daler Sharipov of publishing "extremist" articles on religious matters and accused him of being linked to a banned extremist organisation. Article 189 contains a very broad and vague definition of "extremism"; over the years it has been repeatedly used in politically motivated criminal cases, against dissenting voices in Tajikistan.

Daler Sharipov's arrest and prosecution is retribution for his critical publications and his work as a journalist. He has not committed any recognisable criminal offence and has only exercised his right to freedom of expression through his critical writings. The charge of "inciting religious discord" against him must be dropped, and he must be immediately and unconditionally released.

I am concerned not only by his unfounded prosecution, but also about the reports that he was denied access to his lawyer for several days following his arrest. This violates both his human rights and his procedural rights under Tajikistani law, and can mean only one thing – Daler Sharipov is being subjected to unlawful pressure and is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Over the years, the work of the SCNS – the agency which is investigating his case – has been marred by numerous allegations of use of torture and other ill-treatment, including to extract "confessions" from detainees.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Daler Sharipov is released immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. In the meantime, please ensure his physical and mental integrity, including effective protection from torture or other ill-treatment and an immediate and unimpeded access to his lawyer.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Daler Sharipov is a well-known journalist in Tajikistan, who has covered issues ranging from human rights violations to religious freedom. He worked for the independent newspaper Ozodagon until its closure in 2019, after years of harassment by the authorities.

Article 189 of the Criminal Code, under which Daler Sharipov has been charged, uses a very broad definition of “extremism”, and is often used by the government against its critics, including lawyers, political activists and journalists. It carries a prison sentence of between five and 12 years.

Those already imprisoned under Article 189 include two prisoners of conscience – Khairullo Mirsaidov, an independent journalist currently in political exile, was detained on 5 December 2017 after publishing an open letter addressed to the President of Tajikistan, detailing the corruption of local authorities. [He spent nine months in detention](#). The other prisoner of conscience imprisoned under Article 189 was human rights lawyer, Buzurgmehr Yorov. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison in 2015, on several charges including those under Article 189. His case is believed to have been in retaliation to his work as a lawyer, supporting cases of individuals associated with the political opposition. In 2019 the sentence was reduced to 22 years [as part of a mass amnesty](#).

The State Committee for National Security (SNCS) is one of Tajikistan’s law enforcement agencies. It has the authority to investigate most serious crimes, including crimes against the state, as well as the authority to conduct secret surveillance and recruit secret informers. Over the years, its work has been marred by numerous allegations of abusive practices and serious human rights violations, including the use of torture.

In 2019, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed its concern about the “harassment of independent journalists and media workers for critically reporting on State policies and on other matters of public interest, including through [...] prosecutions on allegedly trumped-up charges”, and called on Tajikistan to “ensure the effective protection of independent journalists and media workers against any form of intimidation and refrain from using civil and criminal provisions, including the provisions on extremism, as well as other regulations, as a tool to suppress critical reporting on matters of public interest”.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, Tajik.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 March 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Daler Sharipov (he/him)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS: Embassy of Tajikistan, 3 Shortlands Hammersmith London W6 8DA (note: there is currently no Ambassador to Tajikistan, only send copies here)