

NEWS

Uzbekistan Jails Migrant Worker For Fighting For Russia In Ukraine

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A court in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Province has sentenced 51-year-old Alisher Xoliqov to five years in prison for mercenary activities with the Russian armed forces in a landmark case highlighting the growing issue of foreigners enlisting to fight in Ukraine.

The November 4 court [ruling](#) shows the risks faced by Central Asian migrants and the harsh legal consequences of their involvement in Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

Xoliqov, an Uzbek citizen, initially moved to Russia in search of work.

His troubles began in November 2023, when, after an altercation with a Russian employer over unpaid wages, he was detained by the police.

Facing the threat of criminal prosecution, Xoliqov was coerced into signing a contract with the Russian Defense Ministry. Media reports say he was allegedly pressured to enlist because of his vulnerability as a migrant worker.

Despite only serving a few months in the Russian military, Xoliqov was deployed to the front line in Ukraine in early 2024.

In February, after crossing the Ukrainian border, his unit was attacked by a drone and he sustained serious injuries.

He was hospitalized in Moscow for treatment and after his discharge, Xoliqov was offered Russian citizenship, which he declined, opting instead to return to Uzbekistan.

He received 800,000 rubles (around \$8,000) in compensation for his brief service, but back in Uzbekistan he was subsequently charged with mercenary activities.

The case has sparked concern over the growing trend of Central Asian nationals being recruited into Russia's military, often under dubious circumstances.

Central Asian governments, including Uzbekistan, have repeatedly warned their citizens about the risks and legal consequences of participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

However, economic hardship and a lack of opportunities at home continue to drive many migrants to seek work in Russia, where they end up joining the army or mercenary groups fighting in Ukraine.

In recent months, other Uzbek nationals have been sentenced for similar offenses.

In October, a court in Uzbekistan's Samarkand Province sentenced a 56-year-old man to three years in prison for mercenary activities. A month earlier, a Tashkent court handed down a parole-like sentence to an alleged member of the Wagner group, a Russian paramilitary organization, who had not participated in combat but was involved in the group's failed mutiny and march toward Moscow last year.

The judicial response to mercenary activities is part of a broader effort by Central Asian authorities to curb the participation of their citizens in foreign conflicts, especially in Ukraine.

These developments also underscore the complex legal and ethical questions surrounding migrant labor and military recruitment in the context of an ongoing war that has drawn in individuals from many countries, particularly former Soviet republics.

With reporting by Uznews.uz

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