Tajikistan

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review

KEY ISSUES REGARDING CIVIC SPACE AND THE PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

For the 53rd session of the UPR working group

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MAIN SUBMITTING ORGANISATION:

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) is the oldest and most experienced non-governmental organization in Poland that works for the protection of human rights in Poland and in Eurasia. The Foundation's Eurasia Department works on the relocation and protection of human rights defenders (HRHub), human rights education (PRLab) and international justice. It has closely cooperated with Tajikistani NGOs on human rights, freedom from torture and penitentiary reform.
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CO-SUBMITTING ORGANISATIONS:

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) is an independent, non-governmental organisation founded in 2008. Based in Brussels, IPHR works closely together with civil society groups from different countries to raise human rights concerns at the international level and promote respect for the rights of vulnerable communities in repressive environments. https://www.IPHRonline.org

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is a global alliance of civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. Founded in 1993, CIVICUS has members in over 180 countries throughout the world.
https://civicus.org/

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1. Introduction

1.1 This submission covers key issues regarding civic space and the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in Tajikistan since 2021. It is based on ongoing cooperation by International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), the CIVICUS Monitor, an online platform that tracks civic space across 198 countries and territories.

1.2 During the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in November 2021, Tajikistan received more than 80 important recommendations related to civic freedoms including the need to decriminalise defamation, end arbitrary internet restrictions, protect civil society, release imprisoned activists and journalists from detention.

1.3 However, since 2022 the situation has not improved but deteriorated further. Tajikistan is facing an ongoing narrowing of civic space marked by growing restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, and independent activists face intimidation, surveillance, arbitrary arrests and prosecution, and long prison sentences on politically motivated charges. Despite international criticism, many prominent HRDs and journalists remain imprisoned. Media freedom is heavily constrained through legal pressure, censorship, and security service interference, while online expression is closely monitored through centralised internet control and affected by vague "extremism" legislation. This has led to a significant decline in civic freedoms, reflected in Tajikistan's downgrade on the CIVICUS Monitor in 2022: its civic space is now assessed as 'closed' - the worst category a country can be in. Tajikistan currently has a score of 10 on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 is the lowest and 100 the highest level of protection and enjoyment of civic freedoms.

1.4 The following sections provide more details on these trends and propose recommendations for the Tajikistani authorities.

1.5 We welcome the attention of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Special Rapporteurs and Treaty Bodies to the issues covered in this submission and urge UN member state delegations to prioritise them during the upcoming UPR.

2. Freedom of expression and the media

2.1 Despite commitments made during previous UPR cycles,[1] freedom of expression in Tajikistan has deteriorated significantly. Broadly worded, criminal law provisions on extremism, incitement to hatred, defamation, and treason are used to punish critics of the authorities or official policies. Internet restrictions, media registration barriers, and intimidation and harassment of journalists and bloggers contribute to a rapidly shrinking civic space. Tajikistan is among the countries with the highest number of imprisoned journalists globally.[2]

In particular, the government obstructs media coverage of politically sensitive issues, such as the situation in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). For example, in May 2022, the independent outlet Asia Plus announced it would cease reporting on developments in GBAO after receiving a warning from the Prosecutor General's Office and facing threats of closure for allegedly "one-sided" coverage of the 2021-2022 protests. Similarly, media outlets in Tajikistan face challenges in reporting on the war in Ukraine or addressing China's growing influence in the country.

2.2 Despite repeated UPR recommendations, Tajikistan has not fully decriminalised defamation and insult.[3] Defamation was partially decriminalised in 2012[4] but failed to meet recommendations accepted by Tajikistan on full decriminalization of defamation.[5]

2.3 Criminal liability for insult remains as Article 330(2) of the Criminal Code punishes publicly "insulting a representative of authority," by fines or up to two years' imprisonment; and Article 137 punishes public insult or defamation against the President, including through mass media and online. Article 137(1) punishes insult/defamation against the Founder of Peace and National Unity
— the Leader of the Nation — using media or the internet by from 2 to 5 year's imprisonment. In September and October 2022 respectively, blogger, former security officer and journalist Mamadsulton Mavlonazarov (or Muhammadi Sulton)[6] and journalist Abdullo Ghurbati7 and were sentenced to prison for insult, amongst other charges.

2.4 Other criminal Code provisions are also misused against journalists who publicly criticize the activities of state bodies. In particular, criminal code Article 307 which punishes extremist activity by imprisonment for up to 12 years has frequently been used to target journalists and bloggers, contributing to self-censorship and pressure on the media. [8]

2.5 Since 2022, over a dozen journalists and bloggers have been sentenced on extremism related

1 For example, Tajikistan had accepted Recommendation No 123.154 (Austria) during its last review, to "Guarantee the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, including by bringing the law on fighting against extremism and the law on counteracting extremism in line with international human rights standards."

2 https://cpj.org/special-reports/2025-journalist-jailings-remain-stubbornly-high-harsh-prison-conditions-pervasive/

3 https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g11/151/36/pdf/g1115136.pdf, https://www.ohchr.org/ru/hr-bodies/upr/uprtjun-contributions-s25, https://www.ohchr.org/ru/hr-bodies/upr/tj-index

4 When parliament repealed Articles 135 and 136 of the Criminal Code in 2012: http://portali-huquqi.tj/publicadliya/view_qonunhoview.php?showdetail=&asosi_id=335

5 118.60 (Lithuania)

6 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32031817.html

7 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32064597.html

8 Criminal Code Article 307(2). 1) Organization of an Extremist Community

charges in unfair trials often held behind closed doors, where the defendants and their lawyers often have been forced to sign non-disclosure agreements. In some cases, legal proceedings have taken place directly on the premises of detention facilities. Among those convicted for extremism since 2022 are journalists Daler Imomali[9], Abdullo Ghurbati[10], Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoada[11], Khushruz Jumaev[12], Zavkibek Saidamini[13], Khurshed Fozilov[14] and Ahmadi Ibrohim[15]. All maintain their innocence. Repeated calls by human rights organizations for their release have been ignored.

2.6 Authorities also try journalists in absentia for alleged propaganda of extremism. For example, in February 2022 journalists Rustami Joni and Anora Sarkorova were charged in absentia for alleged "public calls to carry out extremist activity and public justification of extremism."[16] Both had covered the GBAO events since2022.

2.7 Journalists also frequently face charges of incitement of hatred (Article 189 of the Criminal Code), which is punishable by 12 years' imprisonment. On 22 February 2024, entrepreneur Abduhalila Kholikzoda and writer Abdukodir Rustam were sentenced to nine and four and a half years' imprisonment, respectively, on charges of "incitement of enmity" and ''smuggling'' over a book which discussed corruption in Tajikistan and criticized the authorities of the country.[17]

2.8 Authorities have also prosecuted journalists on charges of "treason" (Article 305 of the Criminal Code), punishable by up to 21 years' imprisonment. For example, in June 2022, a poet named Muyassar was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for treason after he cooperated with "Commission 44", set up in agreement between authorities and protestors to investigate the excessive use of force against protestors in GBAO in November 2021.[18] Muyassar was sentenced for allegedly filming and posting the meetings of "Commission 44" online.[19] Similarly, in December 2022, journalist Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva was found guilty of treason and sentenced to 21 years behind bars in connection with the GBAO unrest.[20] On 5 February 2025, the Supreme Court upheld the sentence of journalist Rukhshona Khakimova to eight years' imprisonment for treason, after she investigated Chinese influence in Tajikistan and interviewed former highly placed officials

9 https://www.azattyqasia.org/a/32089339.html

10 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32089087.html

11 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32194223.html

12 https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/escalating-tensions-crackdown-human-rights-defenders-journalists/#:~:text=On%2020th%20May%202022%2C%20Khushruz%20Jumaev%2C%C2%A0a%20blogger%20from%20GBAO%2C%20mostly%20writing%20cultural%20articles%20about%20the%20region%2C%20was%20arrested%20for%20allegedly%20calling%20for%20a%20seizure%20of%20power%20by%20force%20and%20faces%20other%20charges

13 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32115113.html

14 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32556177.html

15 https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-tadzhikistane-glavnomu-redaktoru-payk-ahmadu-ibrohimu-dali-10-let/33273636.html

16 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32802740.html

17 https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/20240307/verhovnii-sud-abduhalil-holikzoda-prigovoren-k-9-godam-lisheniya-svobodi?utm_gravitec=bell&ysclid=m524cthuf9837969710 and https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/20240307/verhovnii-sud-abduhalil-holikzoda-prigovoren-k-9-godam-lisheniya-svobodi

18 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-civicus-2021-2022/

19 https://rus.ozodi.org/a/31929887.html

20 https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20230511/aktivistku-ulfathonim-mamadshoevu-prigovorennoyu-k-21-godu-tyurmi-pereveli-v-zhenskuyu-koloniyu-v-nureke

convicted of plotting a coup in 2025.[21] Khakimova was tried in closed court proceedings inside a detention facility, with no media or public access. The charges were widely seen as retaliation for her reporting.

2.9 Amendments to Article 140 of the Criminal Procedural Code in December 2022 expanded the grounds for initiating a criminal case to include "statements on the internet". This led to the initiation of criminal cases for digital reactions on social networks (likes and reposts), although these do not constitute "statements" but are rather expressions of opinion. The lack of clear legal definition of digital reactions violates the principle of legal certainty and leads to unjustified restrictions of freedom of expression and freedom of the media as guaranteed by Article 30 of the Tajikistani Constitution and Article 19 of the ICCPR.

2.10 In May 2025 the President signed a law abolishing criminal liability for social media "likes."[22] However, it is unclear how the amended provisions have been implemented in practice. According to the General Prosecutor, this led to charges being dropped against 400 people in 2025,[23] but the chair of the Supreme Court stated that courts did not receive requests to overturn earlier convictions. Additionally, during a press conference in August 2025, government officials indicated that past convictions related to likes and reposts are unlikely to be overturned, claiming that such cases typically also involve other charges.[24]

For example, journalist and editor of the regional newspaper Paik, Ahmad Ibrohim, was convicted both for alleged extremist-related social media activity (under Article 307(1) of the Criminal Code) and alleged bribery (under Article 320 of the Criminal Code), allegedly making his case ineligible for reconsideration.

As recently as September 2025, a resident of GBAO was fined approximately USD 500 for liking a critical article published by the newspaper Pamir Inside, which is not registered in Tajikistan.[25] This case highlights the continued penalisation of online expression despite recent legal amendments and raises concerns about the ongoing use of restrictive measures to target individuals for engaging with critical or unregistered media content.

2.11 The withdrawal of USAID funding led to closures of several independent media outlets in Tajikistan, and weakened others such as the local service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which remains among the few reliable independent sources of information in the region.

2.12 In September 2024, Tajikistani government halted work on drafting a new Law on Mass Media by an expert working group of state and civil society representatives, criticising it for failing to

21 These included former parliament deputy, former leader of the Democratic Party Saidjafar Usmonzoda, sentenced to 27 years'imprisonment, and first deputy of the Democratic party Shokirdzhon Hakimov, sentenced to 18 years. https://rus.ozodi.org/a/osuzhdyonnuyu-za-gosizmenu-zhurnalistku-ruhshonu-hakimovu-pereveli-iz-sizo-v-zhenskuyu-koloniyu/33394583.html

22 See more in Tajikistan Country Focus Report, prepared by IPHR for the EU See initiative, January 2026: https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-country-focus-report-assesses-civil-society-environment/

23 https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20260217/v-tadzhikistane-405-chelovek-osvobozhdeni-ot-otvetstvennosti-za-laiki

24 https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20250807/verhovnii-sud-tadzhikistana-dela-po-uzhe-vinesennim-prigovoram-za-laiki-i-reposti-mogut-bit-peresmotreni

25 https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-tadzhikistane-zhitelya-gornogo-badahshana-oshtrafovali-na-500-za-layk-pod-postom-s-kritikoy-vlasti-v-feysbuke/33536917.html

"pay attention to issues of independence, state security, territorial integrity, culture and national culture". The Working Group (WG) was set up under the Action Plan (2023-2025) for implementing the recently adopted National Strategy of Human Rights (NSHR). The work of the WG has remained on hold at the time of writing.

REGULATION OF THE MEDIA

2.13 Existing legislation hinders the establishment and work of media outlets, especially those critical of the authorities. According to the Law on "State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs" both traditional and online media are required to undergo compulsory state registration. Before registering, print and online media outlets require approval from the Ministry of Culture[26] and security clearance from the State Committee for National Security (SCNS).[27] Several independent media outlets have closed due to registration barriers or orders by courts for them to liquidate.

2.14 Accreditation rules for journalists, including foreign correspondents, lack transparency and effective appeal mechanisms. Short-term "temporary" accreditation continues to be used as a tool of control to restrict the work of reporters who are critical of the government. The law "On the Licensing System", adopted in June 202328, provides for indefinite permits for media outlets, unlike before when they were valid for 3 to 5 years. However, the failure to implement this provision in practice has raised concerns: the Ministry of Culture issues registration certificates for a period of three years, which contradicts the requirements of this Law.

2.15 Television and radio broadcasting in Tajikistan is regulated by the 1996 Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting, which is outdated and no longer reflects the transition to digital broadcasting. While the 2023 Law on the Licensing System has improved some conditions for independent broadcasters—introducing indefinite licences, online applications, and cashless payments—concerns remain over specific legal requirements, in particular, a licence for the production of audiovisual content continues to be required, despite earlier commitments to remove this, creating additional barriers to media operations.[29] In 2023, the State Committee on Television and Radio denied broadcasting licences to five out of six audiovisual production companies that applied for permission to operate, without explaining the grounds for the refusals.[30]

2.16 Several independent media outlets were closed in recent years, due to problems with re-registration. The Supreme Court ruled to liquidate independent newspapers Faraj, Payk, and Samak, and a publication of the Journalism Research Centre of Tajikistan. At a press conference of the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan in January 2026, officials openly outlined the "boundaries of democracy" and justified the closure of media outlets for crossing those boundaries, with the Deputy Minister Davlat Safar explicitly noting that some outlets had previously "ceased operations for going "beyond the limits of freedom of speech."[31]

26 Article 11 of the Law on State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs.

27 Procedure for State Registration of Publishing Activities, Printing Enterprises and the Maintenance of the Unified State Register approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan of 25 February 2017, No. 97.

28 http://portali-huquqi.tj/publicadliya/view_qonunhoview.php?showdetail=&asosi_id=27557

29 Furthermore, under the "Law on the Licensing System" independent broadcasting companies are required to obtain a licence to operate in the field of radio and television broadcasting, and a permit to use radio frequencies.

30 https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/tajikistan-on-the-road-to-total-control/; https://asiaplus.news/2024/01/30/v-tadzhikistane-otkazali-v-vydache-liczenzij-na-veshhanie-pyati-kompaniyam/

31 https://pamirinside.org/analytics/12931

RESTRICTIONS OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

2.17 Authorities continue to periodically block the websites of independent domestic and international media outlets, especially the Tajik service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Ozodi, and the news agency Asia-Plus, in retaliation for critical reporting. Blocking measures are frequently justified with the alleged need for "technical maintenance" and carried out without judicial oversight.

2.18 The Law "On Electronic Communication"[32] grants the State Communication Services[33] broad powers for extrajudicial blocking of online resources on vague national security grounds. Additionally, between 2021-2022 following the protests in GBAO, the internet connection was shut down in the region for over 100 days, limiting access to information[34]. These measures fail to meet the requirements of legality, necessity, and proportionality for restrictions on the right to freedom of expression set out by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

2.19 The Law on Counteracting Extremism (Article 17) allows for blocking online content deemed to "propagate extremism."[35] In June 2023, the independent online news websites New Tajikistan 2 and Pamir Daily News (currently known as Pamir Inside) were blocked after being labelled as extremist by the Supreme Court.[36] The legislation has led to increasing self-censorship among media outlets, further undermining freedom of expression.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Guarantee independent media outlets and journalists' freedom to operate to cover all issues of public interest - including politically sensitive issues - without harassment.
- Bring the Criminal Code in line with Article 19 and 20 of the ICCPR including by fully decriminalizing insult and defamation and by incorporating precise definitions of crimes relating to extremism, terrorism and national security to ensure that peaceful expressions of dissent are not punished.
- Cease using Criminal Code Articles 189 ("Incitement of hatred"), 305 ("Treason"), 307 ("Public calls for violent change of the constitutional order", and 307(1) "Public calls for extremist activities and public justification of extremism",307(2) "Organisation of an extremist group", 307(3) "Organisation of activities of an extremist organization" to prosecute journalists for professional activity and amend them to bring them in line with Articles 19(3) and 20(2) of the ICCPR.
- Quash the sentences of journalists and bloggers convicted for peaceful expression of opinions and immediately and unconditionally release them from detention.
- Resume inclusive consultations on the new draft media law with civil society.
- Amend Article 11 of the Law on State Registration to remove discretionary approval

32 http://mmih.tj/Search/DocumentView?DocumentId=135402# Article 7 of the Law "On Electronic Communication" (2023) and Article 17 of the Law "On Countering Extremism" (2020)

33 https://egov.tj/site/aloka-tj?lang=ru

34 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-civicus-2021-2022/

35 Article 17. Prohibition or restriction of access to information of an extremist nature

36 https://cisatc.org/ru/uchastniki-sodruzhestva-nezavisimykh-gosudarstv/respublika-tadzhikistan

requirements for media outlets through the Ministry of Culture and bring accreditation procedures for foreign media in line with international standards.

- Cease using administrative procedures to restrict independent media operations. Ensure that accreditation procedures comply with international standards and provide effective remedies by developing a new draft Regulation on the Accreditation of Foreign Media and Journalists in accordance with General Comment No. 34, CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011.
- Repeal legal provisions enabling extrajudicial blocking of websites and ensure that any restrictions on access to online content are imposed only after judicial decisions.
- Cease criminal prosecution for online activity, including likes and reposts, and bring legislation into compliance with the right to freedom of speech and expression of opinion. Ensure the effective implementation of the May 2025 decriminalization of social media engagement.
- Ensure the full respect of the right to freedom of expression and full access to information on the Internet, including by ending politically motivated blocking of access to online media and news websites, and restore free access without delay.

3. Human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers at risk

3.1 Officials of the SCNS often summon journalists and human rights defenders for questioning and attempt to influence their professional activities or threaten them.

3.2 Many journalists have left the country in order to continue their work from abroad. In response, the Tajikistani authorities have put pressure on their families, using threats and physical attacks to intimidate those who cover events from outside the country.

3.3 Although it is a criminal offence to obstruct a journalist's work,[37] this provision is not applied in practice and individuals who intimidate journalists typically remain unpunished. Cases of physical attacks on journalists have been documented. For example, in two separate incidents in May 2022, unidentified persons attacked Radio Liberty journalists Mullorajab Yusufzoda and Barotali Nazarov, and Current Time journalists Anushervon Aripov and Nasim Isamov, along with their driver. In both cases, the attackers used physical violence and psychological pressure, and seized equipment and phones. Although a criminal case was opened for theft, the attackers have still not been identified.[38]

3.4 The practice of prosecuting and imprisoning HRDs, journalists and others who criticise or are perceived to criticise the authorities continues. Despite ongoing international calls for their immediate release, several HRDs, lawyers and journalists who have been sentenced to long prison terms following trials which did not meet international standards of fairness remain imprisoned. These include, among others, Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, Daler Imomali, Abdullo Ghurbati, Zavkibek Saidamini, Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoda, and Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva.

37 CC Article 162 punishes "obstruction of the lawful professional activity of a journalist" by imprisonment for up to 5 years.

38 https://about.rferl.org/article/rfe-rl-journalists-beaten-in-tajikistan/

3.5 Independent lawyers in Tajikistan also face serious risks—including arbitrary detention, prosecution, intimidation, and harassment—often in connection with their work on politically sensitive cases, such as those involving victims of human rights violations or opposition figures. For example, Buzurgmehr Yorov, who had earned a reputation as a fearless human rights lawyer and who represented several highly placed opposition members from the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), continues to serve a lengthy prison term that was imposed on him following an unfair trial in October 2016. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention[39], along with other international bodies, has repeatedly called for Yorov's immediate and unconditional release, concluding that the charges against him were initiated in retaliation for his legitimate work as a lawyer.

3.6 Many civil society activists and others who publicly criticized government actions after the GBAO protests in November 2021 were caught up in the clampdown as well as others who joined a committee consisting of government and civil society representatives set up to investigate the events entitled "Commission 44". In May 2022, at least 13 activists, journalists, bloggers and community leaders - members of "Commission 44" - were detained by security services in GBAO based on spurious allegations that they were involved in "extremist groups". Among those targeted were Shaftolu Bekdavlatov, Faromuz Irgashev, Khushruz Djumaev, Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov (see above), Khursand Mamadshoev, Muzaffar Muborakshoev, Khujamri Pirnazarov, and Temur Shonazarov, many of whom were subsequently sentenced to lengthy prison terms in unfair, closed trials.

3.7 In December 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, criticised the Tajikistani authorities in her closing statement following her visit to Tajikistan for targeting "lawyers, journalists and others for their human rights work", urging the government to "treat human rights defenders as allies, not adversaries".[40]

3.8 In March 2023, seven UN Special Rapporteurs expressed concern over the imprisonment of human rights defenders in Tajikistan, warning that extremism and terrorism charges are being misused to silence dissent, alongside serious fair trial violations and allegations of torture and ill-treatment and called on the authorities to ensure accountability and create a safe environment for civil society.[41]

3.9 In her January 2024 report about her visit to Tajikistan,[42] the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders called on the authorities to "drop outstanding criminal charges against and investigations into human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, bloggers (including Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Khushruz Jumaev, Daler Imomali, Abdullo Ghurbati, Ulfatkhonim Mahmadshoeva, and others) and release those who have been convicted for merely exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of assembly and association".

3.10 In June 2024, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an opinion[43] recognising five activists and human rights defenders, including Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, Sorbon Yunoev and Khursand Mamadshoev, as victims of arbitrary

39 https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WGAD/2019/17

40 https://tajikistan.un.org/en/210750-tajikistan-human-rights-defenders-face-increasing-threats-climate-fear-says-un-expert

41 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/tajikistan-un-experts-deplore-criminal-proceedings-against-human-rights

42 https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/50/Add.1

43 https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WGAD/2024/19

detention and reiterating national and international organisations' call to the government of Tajikistan to unconditionally release them and grant compensation and other reparations. No measures have yet been taken to implement the recommendations of these UN structures.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defenders,
- Journalists, bloggers and human rights lawyers Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Khushruz Djumaev, Daler Imomali, Abdullo Ghurbati, Ulfatkhonim Mahmadshoeva, Rukhshona Khakimova, Zavkibek Saidamini, Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoda, Buzurgmehr Yorov and others.
- End politically motivated prosecutions of human rights defenders and journalists, immediately release those arbitrarily detained, and review convictions in line with international fair trial standards.
- End impunity for threats, harassment, and violence against media workers in line with Criminal Code Article 162 which punishes obstructing the legal professional activity of journalists.

4. Restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly

4.1 The right to participate in lawfully established meetings, protests, demonstrations, and peaceful marches is enshrined in Tajikistan's constitution (Article 29).[44] The Law "On Assemblies, Meetings, Demonstrations and Street Rallies", which regulates the organisation and conduct of assemblies, obliges organisers to notify local authorities 15 days in advance of a planned event with no exceptions provided for spontaneous assemblies. Time and place restrictions imposed by the law are extensive, as gatherings are prohibited from taking place near historic and cultural monuments and in proximity to government buildings, among other locations. The law also does not recognise counter-assemblies, as a gathering will be prohibited if it is to be held at a place or time already designated for another event. In practice, the right to peaceful assembly in Tajikistan is severely limited, and gatherings that are perceived as potentially critical of government policies are seldom permitted to take place.[45] When peaceful assemblies do take place, they are often dispersed by security forces, and participants face detention, fines, or other punitive measures.

4.2 In recent years, individuals seeking to exercise their right to freedom of assembly, particularly in GBAO, have faced harsh reprisals, including criminal prosecution under extremism-related charges. The risk of retaliation, including pressure on family members, has created a significant chilling effect and discourages people from participating in public protests.[46]

4.3 There has been no accountability for serious human rights violations perpetrated in connection with the authorities' violent response to mass protests that took place in GBAO in November 2021 and May 2022, leaving at least 40 people dead and a substantially higher number of people

44 https://www.rightofassembly.info/assets/downloads/1994_Constitution_of_Tajikistan_(as_amended)_(English_translation).pdf

45 Law No. 1169 "On Assemblies, Meetings, Demonstrations and Street Rallies" (December 2014).http://portali-huquqi.tj/publicadliya/view_qonunhoview.php?showdetail=&asosi_id=244#A4990YMVH9

46 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-country-focus-report-assesses-civil-society-environment/

injured.[47] Following these events, at least 205 residents of GBAO were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment after closed trials, among whom 11 people received life imprisonment sentences and 85 received terms between 10-29 years.

4.4 The detainees include victims of transnational repression who participated in demonstrations in front of the Tajik Embassy in Moscow demanding investigation into the events in GBAO. Furthermore, many activists who were active in protesting against the events from Russia, were subsequently kidnapped in the Russian Federation, and forcibly returned to Tajikistan before being sentenced to long prison terms, including Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev, Amriddin Alovatshoev, Oraz Vazirbekov and Ramzi Vazirbekov.[48]

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that the right to peaceful assembly can be exercised without undue hindrance, including by removing excessive limitations on where, when, and how assemblies can take place.
- Refrain from using national security or extremism justifications to suppress peaceful protests and avoid criminalising participants.
- End the practice of violent dispersal, arbitrary detention, and prosecution of protesters, particularly in regions such as GBAO, where assemblies have been harshly suppressed.

5. Freedom of association

5.1 Civic space in Tajikistan continues to erode, increasingly limiting the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) to support their communities and defend fundamental rights. CSOs work in an increasingly difficult environment due to restrictive legislation, arbitrary registration practices, frequent inspections and growing administrative barriers.[49]

5.2 The Civil Code of Tajikistan recognises different organisational forms of non-commercial organisations. The establishment of a public association requires registration with the Ministry of Justice in a more complex procedure, while other forms of non-commercial organisations (public foundations and associations of legal entities) are registered with the local tax authorities.[50] The legislative framework for civil society in Tajikistan is restrictive, in particular when it comes to the registration of new groups, reporting requirements and funding. Amendments introduced on 10 October 2018 to the Law on Public Associations obligates CSOs to register foreign grants and provide project implementation plans to the Ministry of Justice, which has the right to conduct unscheduled inspections of CSO activities.[51]

5.3 On a positive note, the 2022 Law on non-discrimination allows CSOs to represent victims and monitor the implementation of the law in practice.

47 https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/escalating-tensions-crackdown-human-rights-defenders-journalists/

48 Transnational repression affects other categories of activists, human rights defenders and journalists from Tajikistan for more information see https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2025/754475/EXPO_STU(2025)754475_ EN.pdf

49 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-country-focus-report-assesses-civil-society-environment/

50 See notes on barriers to registering different types of non-commercial organisations here: https://www.icnl.org/resources/ civic-freedom-monitor/tajikistan

51 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-country-focus-report-assesses-civil-society-environment/

5.4 A Draft Law on Non-Commercial Organisations is currently in development, which seeks to regulate non-commercial organisations other than public associations under one unified framework. Under the current proposal, this would require organisations registered as public foundations to liquidate and re-register, creating a significant risk of selective refusals and could lead to the closure of established organisations, particularly those engaged in human rights work. The last version of the draft law was made publicly available in 2018. Although selected CSO representatives were invited to participate in discussions about the draft law with government officials in August 2025, they were not given access to the draft text, and it remains unclear whether their input will be included. The overall process has also been marked by a lack of transparency, including limited public access to draft texts and insufficient clarity regarding decision-making and review procedures.

5.5 Registration procedures are unpredictable and inconsistently applied, and are influenced by political considerations, which discourages new civil society initiatives.

5.6 Close monitoring by state authorities remains a defining feature of the environment in which CSOs operate. Organisations working on issues considered politically or socially sensitive— e.g. human rights, governance, gender equality, or minority rights—are frequently subjected to intimidation through additional tax inspections, fire safety checks, legal pressure, and forced closures due to alleged violations. These measures are often disproportionate or selectively applied, creating a chilling effect on civic engagement. In practice, there are few effective safeguards to protect CSOs from arbitrary or excessive interference by state bodies.

5.7 The number of registered public associations has dropped sharply, with hundreds forced to close following the 2021-2022 protests in GBAO. Civil society leaders in GBAO were reportedly summoned by authorities and pressured to dissolve their organisations, whilst others were shut down by court decisions on questionable, politically motivated grounds.52 Authorities have also reportedly delayed or rejected applications to register new CSOs, particularly in GBAO, and there have been allegations that officials demanded bribes in exchange for registration. Reportedly only 35 registered organizations remain in GBAO, of which fewer than 10 are engaged in promoting the rights of vulnerable groups, and the majority are local branches of larger organizations —for instance, the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan alone accounts for 17. In March 2024, the UN Special Rapporteurs Mary Lawlor (Human Rights Defenders) and Clément Nyaletsossi Voule (Assembly and Association)53 raised concerns over the mass dissolution of NGOs in Tajikistan, warning of a deteriorating environment for civil society, increased intimidation of human rights defenders, and calling on the government to reverse the closures and treat civil society as partners rather than adversaries.

5.8 Overall, in mid-2025, 1726 public associations remained officially registered in the country. According to the Ministry of Justice, 138 applications for the registration of new associations and the accreditation of branches and representative offices were submitted during the first six months of 2025, compared to 158 applications during the same period in 2024. Of these, 29 applications were rejected for alleged non-compliance with national legislation, including with the Law “On Public Associations.”

52 https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-country-focus-report-assesses-civil-society-environment/

53 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/tajikistan-un-expert-criticises-dissolution-700-ngos

5.9 As of 1 October 2025, fees for registering branches of international organisations or their representative offices increased from 7500 to 15 000 Somoni (around 1500 USD). The cost of registering national public associations also doubled, creating further financial barriers, particularly for smaller or regional organisations, and undermining the sustainability of civil society groups given the significant recent reduction in international donor funding for Tajikistan.

5.10 There are frequent, credible reports[54] of significant pressure on CSO leaders by security services, sometimes through phone calls with implicit threats, such as references to personal information or family members, suggesting close monitoring and surveillance. In other cases, CSO representatives are formally summoned for questioning by security authorities, where they are asked about their work and accused of "speaking negatively about the country." Such practices affect organisations across different sectors, including those engaged in areas generally considered non-sensitive, such as social services. Together, these measures contribute to self-censorship and intimidation, fostering a broader climate of fear that restricts independent civic activity.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that the draft law amendments to the law on Non-Commercial Organisations and existing laws regulating NGO activities (including the Civil Code and the Law on Public Associations) are brought into line with freedom of association standards as well as the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders following her visit in 2022 to Tajikistan.[55]
- Ensure the swift registration of CSOs from GBAO and other regions and encourage, inter alia, recent initiatives by the GBAO Justice Department to re-register those previously closed down.
- Foster a safe and enabling environment for peaceful civil society activity, in line with Tajikistan's commitment to guarantee the right to freedom of association under Article 22 of the ICCPR.

54 https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/tajikistan-country-focus-report.pdf

55 https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5550add1-visit-tajikistan-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human