

Central Asia: Worsening Human Rights Records

Growing Number of Activists, Journalists Imprisoned Across the Region

(Brussels, January 16, 2025) – Authorities in all five Central Asian countries clamped down on dissent and tightened controls over freedom of expression during 2024, imprisoning government critics, activists, and journalists in increasing numbers, and in some instances hiding behind the veneer of reform promises, Human Rights Watch said today in its *World Report 2025*.

For the 546-page world report, in its 35th edition, Human Rights Watch reviewed human rights practices in more than 100 countries. In much of the world, Executive Director [Tirana Hassan](#) writes in [her introductory essay](#), governments cracked down and wrongfully arrested and imprisoned political opponents, activists, and journalists. Armed groups and government forces unlawfully killed civilians, drove many from their homes, and blocked access to humanitarian aid. In many of the more than 70 national elections in 2024, authoritarian leaders gained ground with their discriminatory rhetoric and policies.

“In 2024, authorities across Central Asia ramped up intimidation, harassment, and prosecution of critical activists and journalists,” said [Hugh Williamson](#), Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “As more and more Central Asian activists are thrown in jail for simply exercising their right to freedom of speech or peaceful opposition activism, it is increasingly important to call attention to their plight and press for their release.”

- Courts in [Kazakhstan](#) sentenced the activist and journalist Duman Mukhammedkarim and the opposition activist Asylbek Zhamuratov each to seven years in prison on overbroad extremism charges. The authorities even prosecuted comedians. A new media law threatens media freedom in the country.
- In [Kyrgyzstan](#), two journalists associated with Temirov Live, an investigative outlet exposing high-level corruption by authorities, were sentenced to up to six years in prison for allegedly “calling for disobedience and riots.” A court ordered the closure of an award winning investigative outlet, Kloop Media, on the trumped-up pretext of “making calls for violent seizure of power online.”
- Authorities in [Tajikistan](#) initiated investigations against Anora Sarkorova, a journalist reporting on the crackdown in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region (GBAO), and against Ahmad Ibrohim, chief editor of one of the last independent newspapers, Payk. Seven journalists are behind bars for their critical reporting.
- [Turkmenistan](#)’s government retained harsh restrictions on free expression and total control over access to information. It continued to groundlessly and arbitrarily bar some people from foreign travel and refuse to renew passports abroad. The authorities arrested and imprisoned several people who had been living abroad and were deported back to Turkmenistan.
- Authorities in [Uzbekistan](#) prosecuted activists on unfounded criminal charges, with a Kashkadarya court sentencing Dildora Khakimova and Nargiza Keldiyorova to six and six-and-a-half years in prison, respectively. Uzbekistan’s Supreme Court rejected the appeal of the imprisoned Karakalpak lawyer-blogger Dilmurod Tazhimuratov.

The governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan should release wrongfully imprisoned activists and journalists and uphold the right to freedom of expression. The European Union, United States, and other partners should call out Central Asian governments for imprisoning rights defenders and journalists, who at great risk to themselves, work tirelessly to hold their governments to account.

