

in late June. This highlighted the inadequacy of Taiwan's present legal framework regarding refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection (such as *non-refoulement*) and led to renewed calls for the adoption of a Refugee Act.

INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY

On 29 June, the government announced it was inviting national and international experts to review its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).⁶ This International Review Committee is expected to gather for its third review from 18 to 22 October 2021.

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1. Taiwan: Submission to the International Review Committee on the domestic implementation of the ICCPR and ICESCR: 3rd reports, (ASA 38/3212/2020)
 2. Taiwan: Amendment to the regulations for the execution of the death penalty: General Comment No. 36 of ICCPR should be included (Statement, 20 July, Chinese only)
 3. Taiwan: Second execution under President Tsai (Statement, 2 April, English and Chinese)
 4. Taiwan: Establishment of National Human Rights Commission (Press statement, 19 June, Chinese only)
 5. Taiwan: World Refugee Day (Press statement, 19 June, Chinese only)
 6. Taiwan: Submission to the International Review Committee on the domestic implementation of the ICCPR and ICESCR (Press release 23 October 2020, in both English and Chinese)

TAJIKISTAN

Republic of Tajikistan

Head of state: **Emomali Rahmon**

Head of government: **Qokhir Rasulzoda**

The authorities tightly controlled news and information around the COVID-19 pandemic and restricted freedom of expression, blaming media and civil society for spreading “false” information. The courts used counter-terrorism legislation to block access to some independent media outlets based abroad. A journalist was imprisoned for “inciting religious discord”. Personal protective equipment received by health

care workers in hospitals, care homes and detention facilities was inadequate, as was protection given to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

BACKGROUND

The authorities long denied the advent and scope of COVID-19 infections, but imposed restrictions, including shutting the borders and closing all detention facilities to visitors. Remittances (previously comprising a third of gross domestic product), fell by over 50% prompting fears of food shortages. In September, the International Monetary Fund reported that Tajikistan was experiencing “severe effects” from the pandemic. President Emomali Rahmon, effectively uncontested, was re-elected in October.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Blocking internet-based information resources and, intermittently, internet access remained popular tools in the authorities’ campaign against critical voices. The President signed a new Law on Counteracting Extremism in January, granting the authorities wide-ranging powers to restrict freedom of expression. Thirteen government agencies were authorized to request the Communication Service to block websites without judicial review.

In February, the Supreme Court concluded that the foreign-based independent news website Akhbor offered a platform to “terrorists and extremists” and ruled to block it. This effectively made journalists working for Akhbor members of a banned “extremist” organization and so liable to prosecution. In November, Akhbor’s editor-in-chief stated that he was forced to close down the website due to security risks to all those associated with it, including its readers.

The authorities continued to use charges of “incitement to discord” and “terrorism and extremism” against journalists and bloggers who published critical material on politically sensitive topics.

In April, a court in the capital Dushanbe found independent journalist Daler Sharipov guilty of “inciting religious discord” for

publishing and disseminating unofficially his dissertation on Islam and sentenced him to one year in prison. The prosecutor argued that he had published “extremist” articles and had links to an extremist organization. Daler Sharipov rejected the charges but admitted that he might have “made mistakes” in the dissertation; he did not appeal his sentence.¹

Media restrictions during the pandemic

The authorities tightly controlled the narrative and messaging around the COVID-19 pandemic and introduced new legislation against “false” information about coronavirus infections.

In June, Parliament adopted changes to the Administrative Code to punish, with substantial fines, journalists, bloggers, and others for distributing “inaccurate” and “untruthful” information about the pandemic through mass media or social networks.

The amendments exposed users of mobile messenger apps to prosecution for sharing “unreliable” information and gave the security services powers to monitor private correspondence. Those wishing to share their experiences of COVID-19 on social media had to obtain an official certificate confirming their diagnosis, or risk prosecution for distributing “false” information.

Prisoners of conscience

In April, the health of human rights lawyer Buzurgmekhr Yorov sharply deteriorated, with COVID-19-consistent symptoms. It improved but anonymous sources reported some months later that his health continued to be fragile and that he was facing punishment from prison authorities for interacting with fellow prisoners and giving them legal advice.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

According to UN agencies in Tajikistan, as of 8 June, 1,701 health care workers (36% of all those infected in the country) had contracted COVID-19, including 619 doctors and 548 nurses, while Radio Ozodi published an official list of 10 medical personnel who died in Khatlon Region. The lack of adequate

PPE was the main reason, as confirmed by health care workers anonymously on social media, who also complained that authorities had forbidden them from sharing any information about COVID-19. Nonetheless, the authorities insisted in July that not a single medical doctor had died from COVID-19.

Anonymous sources also reported a lack of PPE for health care workers in the military, the penitentiary system, children’s homes and care homes for older people. COVID-19 was of particular concern in detention centres, criticized by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2019 for chronic overcrowding, poor sanitary facilities and lack of adequate medical care. These conditions, which did not improve in 2020, facilitated the spread of infectious diseases among prisoners.

After the borders were closed, thousands of migrant labourers found themselves stranded in airports, cars or makeshift camps at the borders, or in quarantine facilities without access to adequate sanitary and medical facilities.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The government failed to combat domestic violence effectively and ensure adequate protection to survivors.

Crisis centres reported an alarming increase in cases of domestic and gender-based violence during the pandemic. The Gulrukhshor Women’s Centre in Khudjand, northern Tajikistan, received 142 applications in May alone, a threefold increase from the previous month.

In October, a court in Dushanbe found a young fashion designer guilty of defamation. She had accused her former employer of physical violence and verbal threats of rape. The newspaper that had published her story was also found guilty of defamation. Both were sentenced to pay financial compensation. The authorities failed to investigate the allegations despite compelling evidence.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people

Without access to already very scarce community resources and support structures, LGBTI people, in particular young people, similarly could not leave their homes and were forced into cohabitation with unsupportive, often abusive, families.

1. Tajikistan: Independent journalist imprisoned for a year (EUR 60/2206/2020)

TANZANIA

United Republic of Tanzania

Head of state and government: **John Pombe Magufuli**

The government restricted the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in the run-up to the October elections. The President declared Tanzania to be COVID-19-free in June. The authorities severely restricted media freedom, claiming they were curbing the “spread of false news” on the pandemic. Media outlets were shut down for reporting on political events. Pregnant schoolgirls were banned from mainstream schools and segregated in alternative education centres.

BACKGROUND

On 28 October, Tanzania held its sixth general election since the reintroduction of the multi-party system in 1992. In November, the President began his second term in office following a controversial election. In the run-up to, during and after elections, opposition politicians and hundreds of their supporters were arbitrarily arrested and beaten by the police, and others were killed. Several politicians, including Tundu Lissu, the presidential candidate for Chadema, the main opposition party, and opposition politicians, Lazaro Nyalandu and Godbless Lema and his family fled the country after the elections, fearing persecution.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

The government withheld information relating to COVID-19 and disregarded WHO guidance about how governments, health professionals and the general public should respond to the pandemic. There was no reliable or prompt system of accurate information on the pandemic at the end of the year. On 29 April, the government stopped publishing information on infection rates. On 5 June, the President announced that the country was free of COVID-19, making it harder for Tanzanians to take adequate steps to protect themselves from infection.

Prison conditions

In April, the President pardoned 3,717 prisoners in line with WHO recommendations to decongest prisons to limit the spread of COVID-19. However, prisons remained overcrowded, putting prisoners' health at risk. There were 32,438 prisoners, of which 17,974 were on remand; the prison population was 9% over capacity.

DISCRIMINATION – WOMEN AND GIRLS

Pregnant girls and young mothers were discriminated against in the education sector. The government continued to ban them from schools and used a World Bank loan – intended for the improvement of girls' secondary school education – to maintain their segregation in alternative learning centres, where the four-year lower secondary school curriculum was compressed into two years.

REPRESSION OF DISSENT

The authorities used legislation to silence peaceful dissent and severely restricted the right to freedom of expression and media freedom, particularly in the run-up to the elections.

In April, the Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority (TCRA) fined Star Media Tanzania Limited, Multichoice Tanzania Limited and Azam Digital Broadcast Limited TZS5 million (US\$2,150), and ordered them to apologize for “spreading false and