DIGITAL RIGHTS IN TAJIKISTAN

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW SUBMISSION

SESSION 53

SUBMITTING ORGANISATIONS

Curious Shapes is a strategy, research, and communications collective working at the intersection of technology, democracy, and social change. For over a decade, they've collaborated with civil society organizations, movements, technologists, tool developers, and funders across the world to understand complex challenges and develop effective, creative approaches to building power and protecting rights in difficult contexts.

Freedom of Expression Hub was formally established in 2018 with the mandate to promote and safeguard the right to freedom of expression, the media, and access to information, both online and offline, within Uganda, across the African continent, and globally. The organization has actively contributed to the advancement of these rights through dedicated efforts in research and documentation, advocacy, strategic litigation, fostering strategic collaborations, and implementing capacity building initiatives.

Uproar is a Small Media initiative that champions digital rights in over 36 countries across Africa, MENA, and Central Asia through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Now hosted by the Freedom of Expression Hub, Uproar empowers local civil society to engage effectively in the UPR, driving domestic implementation and real policy changes. Our locally-led, sustainable advocacy bridges the gap between international commitments and domestic policy, leading to major reforms and the enactment of digital rights legislation in various countries.

curious shapes FOE-HUB FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION UPROAR

INTRODUCTION

1. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is an important UN Human Rights Council mechanism aimed at addressing human rights issues across the globe. FOE HUB and Curious Shapes welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Republic of Tajikistan's fourth review cycle.

2. This submission examines the right to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the right to privacy. Specifically, the report raises concerns on legislative restriction through the Criminal Code; arrests, attacks and harassment of independent journalists and protesters; closed and sham trials, particularly during the uprisings in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) region; internet shutdowns and censorship of online speech; and the closure of media outlets.

UPDATES SINCE PREVIOUS REVIEW

3. During the third UPR cycle in 2021, Tajikistan received 234 recommendations and supported 180 recommendations at the adoption of its UPR outcome at Human Rights Council 49, in March 2022 (an increase of 17.6% with respect to the 2nd cycle).)[1]

4. Among the recommendations, 28 relate to freedom of expression. Of these, 10 were supported and 18 were noted. These included 11 recommendations on bringing legislation into conformity with international standards, including the decriminalization of defamation (5 supported, 6 noted).[2] Tajikistan also received 7 recommendations on lifting restrictions in the digital sphere, including internet blocking (2 supported, 5 noted),[3] and 18 recommendations on ensuring media freedom and the safety of journalists (6 supported, 12 noted).[4]

5. Despite the number of recommendations supported, no substantial progress has been observed by civil society, in their implementation.

[1] See, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/hrbodies/upr/documents/session39/tj/2022-07-14/tajikistan.pdf
[2] 123.67 (Costa Rica); 123.76 (Ireland — noted); 123.78 (Italy); 123.142 (Norway); 123.145 (Slovakia); 123.150 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — noted); 123.151 (Lithuania — noted); 123.154 (Austria); 123.159 (Czechia — noted); 123.160 (Denmark — noted); 123.161 (Estonia); 123.164 (Germany — noted).
[3] 123.145 (Slovakia); 123.146 (Spain — noted); 123.148 (Sweden — noted); 123.150 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — noted); 123.161 (Estonia); 123.164 (Germany — noted); 123.165 (Ireland — noted).
[4] 123.67 (Costa Rica); 123.78 (Italy); 123.144 (Latvia); 123.145 (Slovakia); 123.146 (Spain — noted); 123.149 (Ukraine — noted); 123.150 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — noted); 123.151 (Lithuania — noted); 123.152 (Austria — noted); 123.153 (Australia — noted); 123.154 (Austria); 123.156 (Belgium — noted); 123.157 (Canada — noted); 123.159 (Czechia — noted); 123.160 (Denmark — noted); 123.162 (France — noted); 123.164 (Germany — noted); 123.164 (United States of America).

6. Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rahmon, who took office in 1992 continues to consolidate his power. Even though Tajikistan's laws guarantee freedom of expression and protection of media, it remains one of "the most repressive countries in the world."[5] During the period under review, freedom of expression was severely restricted. CIVICUS Monitor changed Tajikistan's rating from "repressed" to "closed" with journalists jailed, intimidated and frequent criminal prosecutions based on social media activity.

7. Tajikistan's 2025 World Press Freedom Index ranking continues to be dire, as they are ranked at 153 out of 180 countries according to Reporters Without Borders. RSF states that the government has closed many independent media outlets, like *Ozodagon* and *Akhbor*, forcing dozens of journalists into exile. With under half the population having internet access, the -constant blocking of major news and social media sites has pushed many Tajik outlets to operate from abroad. Foreign journalists face threats of accreditation cancellation or outright rejection.[6]

8. Protests in the Gorno- Badakhshan region led to repression of journalists, protesters and the shuttering of media outlets reporting on the unrest. Journalists in exile, and their families were also targeted. However, President Rahmon signed a law abolishing criminal liability for interacting with social media posts, which was welcomed by human rights activists.[7]

9. Internet access in Tajikistan is extremely expensive. Only 56% of its citizens are reported to use the internet, as of 2025.[8] The government strictly limits the right to protest. Local government approval is required to hold demonstrations but is rarely granted.[9] During the period under review, in March 2021, large scale protests broke out in Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region, after police killed a local resident. According to Human Rights Watch, two protesters were killed when security officers fired into a crowd of demonstrators. Ethnic minority group Pamiri make up the majority of the Gorno-Badakhshan region.

10. In May 2022, a military operation began in response to a resurgence of protests, and police used rubber bullets and tear gas against demonstrators.[10] Hundreds of activists and protesters were arrested, and up to 40 people were reported as killed, including Mamadbokir Mamadbokirov, a prominent figure in the region.[11]

[5] https://uproar.fyi/where-we-work/country/tajikistan
[6] https://rsf.org/en/country/tajikistan
[7] https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/eastern-europe-and-central-asia/tajikistan/report-tajikistan/
[8] https://datahub.itu.int/data/?e=TJK&c=701&i=11624
[9] https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2024
[10] https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/26/tajikistan-stop-abusing-autonomous-region-protesters
[11] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/122369/pdf/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Six civil society activists from the Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Region in Tajikistan,[12] who were also detained in connection with protests in May 2022, have received lengthy prison terms.[13]

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

11. Tajikistan is a party to several core international human rights treaties, which impose binding legal obligations on the state. Since independence in 1991, Tajikistan has ratified seven core international human rights instruments. Among the most significant is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Tajikistan ratified in 1993.

12. Tajikistan is also a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),[14] which emphasizes the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promotes the values of freedom of expression and media freedom in particular.[15]

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION

13. Article 30 of the Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees the rights to "freedom of speech, publishing, and the right to use means of mass information" and prohibits "state censorship and prosecution for criticism."[16] Article 29 of the Constitution also guarantees "the right to take part in meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and peaceful processions prescribed by law."[17]

14. Tajikistan's legislation criminalises certain forms of expression, including criticism of State bodies and public officials. This is evidenced by several provisions of the Criminal Code: Article 330 addresses "Insulting a representative of the authorities"; Article 137 covers— public insult or defamation of the President; and Article 137(1) criminalises insult of the Leader of the Nation through the media or the internet, an offence punishable by up to 5 years' imprisonment.

15. These provisions are formulated in overly broad terms and are open to arbitrary application. Additional provisions are also used to limit freedom of expression. Article 189 of the Criminal Code concerning "incitement to hatred" is punishable by up to 12 years' imprisonment; Articles 307 and 307(1) pertain to extremism and Article 305, provides for "high treason".

[12] https://www.hrw.org/europe/central-asia/tajikistan
[13] https://www.azattyqasia.org/a/32170517.html
[14] https://www.osce.org/countries
[15] https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf
[16] The Constitution of The Republic of Tajikistan, 1994, https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b50910.pdf.
[17] Id.

MEDIA FREEDOM

16. Independent journalists, including those in exile, as well as their close relatives, continued to be targeted through intimidation, assault and arrest. Journalists from international and independent outlets, such as Radio Liberty, Asia Plus, are continuously targeted. Prior to 2022, CPJ reported that Tajikistan rarely jailed journalists.[18] However, during the period under review, at least ten media workers were arrested and convicted, many on extremism-related charges. [19]

17. Journalists were especially targeted during unrest in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBOA). During the period under review, the use of article 305 of the Criminal Code ("high treason") and article 330 (participation with banned organization) against journalists intensified.

18. On 4 June 2022, journalist Daler Imomali, was summoned and questioned by law enforcement officers after recording a programme at the reception office of the chairman of the Shohmansur district in Dushanbe. In October 2022, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of "knowingly providing false information about a crime," "illegal entrepreneurship," and "participation in the activities of a banned organization, *Group 24,* under Article 330 of the criminal code."[20]

19. Journalist and documentary filmmaker Abdullo Ghurbati was also sentenced to seven and a half years on extremism charges under article 330 of the Criminal Code.[21] Earlier in May 2020, the independent filmmaker was assaulted in two separate incidents while reporting.[22]

20. In July 2022, Zavqibek Saidamini and blogger Abdusattor Pirmuhammadzoda were both detained following publishing calls to release their colleagues journalists Daler Imomali and Avazmad Ghurbatov.[23] Saidamini has a popular YouTube channel where he covered allegations of unlawful military drafting practices. Similarly, he covered alleged government injustices on his popular YouTube Channel.[24] Saidamini was convicted under article 330 of the Criminal Code, which criminalises "insulting a government representative."[25]

[18] https://cpj.org/2024/01/in-tajikistan-independent-media-throttled-by-state-repression/
[19] https://rsf.org/en/country/tajikistan
[20] https://www.azattyqasia.org/a/32089339.html
[21] https://cpj.org/2022/10/tajikistan-journalist-abdullo-ghurbati-sentenced-to-7-5-years-in-prison/
[22] https://www.azattyqasia.org/a/30649060.html
[23] https://cpj.org/2022/07/tajikistan-authorities-arrest-2-journalists-who-criticized-other-journalists-detentions/
[24] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdrrVP-dDhoatmN4lO7YIDg
[25] https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32115113.html

21. On 9 December 2022, Ulfatkhanim Mamadshoeva, journalist and activist, was given a 21-year prison sentence for organizing protests in the GBAO region in May 2022. The criminal charges and proceedings which transpired within a closed court, were filed against Mamadshoeva, for "public calls to overthrow the constitutional order."[26]

22. On 5 February 2025, Tajikistan's Supreme Court convicted Rukhshona Khakimova of high treason under article 305 of the Criminal Code and sentenced her to eight years in prison.[27] Ms Khakimova's prosecution, criminalisation, and arbitrary detention stem from her professional work, specifically her involvement in conducting politically sensitive work on China's international aid to Tajikistan[28] The OHCHR expressed concern over the case and called for a re-trial, as she was not informed of the charges for several months and her lawyers were denied access to case documents, amongst other court violations in- line.[29]

23. In March 2023, The security services arrested independent journalist Khurshed Fozilov when he refused to allow an officer to search his phone without a warrant, according to Freedom House.[30] In May 2023, in a closed trial, Fozilov was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of supporting a banned extremist group (article 330 of the Criminal Code) and for accepting payment for material he gave to an international media outlet.[31] The journalist's family claimed he had not sent information to the outlet as it has been banned since in 2020. Fozilov's appeal was denied in July 2025.[32]

24. In August 2025, Ahmadi Ibrohim, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Payk, was arrested on bribery, extortion and extremism charges.[33] Payk is one of the only independent media outlets in Tajikistan's southern Khatlon Province.

25. Journalists were also assaulted during the period under review. On 4 March 2021, while preparing a report on rising fuel prices connected to the company Soro Oil, Radio Liberty journalists Mullorajab Yusufi and Shakhlo Abdulloeva were assaulted. A Soro Oil employee shoved Abdulloeva, blocking the video camera; Another employee punched Yusufi, in the jaw.[34]

[26] https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20230511/aktivistku-ulfathonim-mamadshoevu-prigovorennoyu-k-21-godu-tyurmi-pereveli-v-zhenskuyu-koloniyu-v-nureke
[27] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/tajikistan-un-expert-calls-release-and-retrial-rukhshona-khakimova
[28] https://dxp1xt6rk7zm8.cloudfront.net/a/rukhshona-hakimovaro-habs-kardand/33303810.html
[29] https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/tajikistan-un-expert-calls-release-and-retrial-rukhshona-khakimova
[30] https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2024
[31] https://www.azattyqasia.org/a/32556177.html
[32] https://freedomhouse.org/country/tajikistan/freedom-world/2024
[33] https://cpj.org/2025/01/tajik-journalist-ahmad-ibrohim-sentenced-to-10-years-in-prison/
[34] https://www.ozodi.org/a/31133388.html

26. On 17 May 2022, journalists for Current Time, part of Radio Liberty, Anushervan Aripov, Nasim Isamov, Mullorajab Yusuf, and Barot Yusuf, were assaulted, where Yusuf reportedly received several heavy blows to the head and body. They had been covering the anti-government protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. Their equipment and mobile phones were also seized.[35]

27. Journalists are regularly summoned, searched and intimidated by the State Committee for National Security.

28. The outlet Asia- Plus was repeatedly targeted in the period under review, leading to self-censorship, which illustrates the broader pattern of extra-judicial pressure on independent media. On 22 May 2022, Asia-Plus journalist Ramziya Mirzobekova was summoned to law enforcement authorities and questioned in connection with the events in Badakhshan. The authorities confiscated her computer and phone.[36] On 24 June 2022, several officials from the Shohmansur district prosecutor's office came to the office of the Asia-Plus agency, and forced journalist Emomali Sayidzoda to come in for questioning, which lasted for three hours. His phone was confiscated.[37] On 17 May 2022, Asia-Plus received a notice from the General Prosecutor's Office that the outlet was covering the events in GBAO "in a one-sided manner" and "destabilizing the situation in the country." Asia-Plus was instructed to "remedy the shortcomings," failure of which it faced closure. The outlet then stopped covering developments in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region.[38]

29. On 26 September 2024, staff of Asia-plus were threatened by the Deputy Director of a school and a group of parents and teachers, following an article on illegal fee collection. A journalist was told to "be more careful on the streets at night."[39]

30. On 2 May 2025, the second International Conference of Women Journalists of Central Asia, which was organised by the media unit of the OSCE and the EU was disrupted in the capital Dushanbe. Staff of the hotel, where the event was to have taken place, asked participants to leave the hall without providing any explanation. Representatives of the hotel stated that they had been ordered to cancel the event.[40]

[35] https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-dushanbe-napali-na-s-yemochnuyu-gruppu-nastoyashchego-vremeni/31854597.html
[36] https://www.ozodi.org/a/31885631.html
[37] https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/laworder/20241011/aziya-plyus-podala-zayavlenie-v-umvd-dushanbe-na-zamestitelya-direktora-litseya-5
[38] https://www.asiaplustj.info/tj/news/tajikistan/security/20220517/izoroti-aziya-plyus-dar-mavridi-vazi-vmkb
[39] https://www.ozodi.org/a/aziya-plyus-az-tahdidi-kormandonash-ba-maqomot-shikoyat-kardaast/33156140.html
[40] https://www.ozodi.org/a/33402948.html

31. Pressure on journalists' family members has also been reported, including threats and summons for questioning by the security services. On 5 February 2025, the Supreme Court sentenced Ahmadshoh Komilzoda, the former first deputy chairman of the Democratic Party and journalist. He was found guilty of the violent seizure of power through abuse of official position, under article 306, part 2.[41] As a result, Shakhnoz Komilzoda, the daughter of Ahmadshoh Komilzoda, also a journalist, was convicted of high treason, and fled the country because of pressure from the authorities.[42]

32. In addition, criminal proceedings have been initiated in absentia. In February 2022, Charges of extremism under article 307(1) of the Criminal Code were brought against Rustamjon Joniyev and Anora Sarkorova, who are based in Europe. Authorities informed the mother of Sarkorova that a criminal case has been opened against her daughter,[43] The case was also opened against Rustam Joni, a journalist and Anora Sarkorova's husband, being accused of promoting extremism.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

33. Tajikistan has an access to information law, which was first adopted in 2002.[44] The law is considered "problematic" and its most critical flaw lies in its appeals structure. The legislation does not provide the right to appeal either internally through the public authority or externally in the form of an administrative appeal body. The only route to reconsider refused requests lies in a judicial appeal. In general, the law is restrictive in scope.

34. In 2021, a new law was adopted on access to information about the activities of the courts. While the law increased access to court documents and took several other positive steps forward, there is still a broad category of 'classified' information which remains inaccessible to the public and journalists.[45] Although the passing of the access to information law and its additional provisions was welcomed, there is a wide gap between the formal legal framework and its actual implementation. In practice, journalists are unable to investigate issues surrounding the government. Restricted access to information about government activities is therefore, exclusively reserved for the state news agency Khovar.[46]

[41] https://asiaplustj.info/news/tajikistan/20250213/dodgoi-olii-toikiston-rasman-va-bori-avval-barhe-uziyoti-parvandai-tabaddulot-ro-shar-dod
[42] https://d2shuz4qdwkdru.cloudfront.net/a/az-oni-onho-nest-shikoyati-nazdikoni-du-chehrai-shinokhta-az-musodirai-doroi/33390648.html
[43] https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32802740.html
[44] https://www.rti-rating.org/wp-content/uploads/Tajikistan.pdf
[45] https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/TajikistanReport-Nov-2022.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[46] https://fergana.agency/articles/105794/?

35. Opaque registration and licensing procedures for media outlets continue to hinder access to information, in the absence of an effective mechanism of appeal. Media outlets are required to obtain several official authorizations, including clearances from State bodies, including a certificate from the State Committee on National Security of Tajikistan.[47] These procedures lack transparency and are frequently accompanied by delays.

INTERNET SHUTDOWNS AND ONLINE CENSORSHIP

36. Tajikistan has a history of selective filtering and blocking of media outlets.[48] The State Communications Service, the official communications regulator, *Tojiktelekom*, routinely denies blocking sites, but the government periodically stated that it implemented a law that allowed interruption of internet content and telecommunications "in the interest of national security."[49]

37. *Tojiktelekom* is the sole entity permitted to import internet traffic in Tajikistan, giving the government direct, centralised control to block any website without needing to involve private ISPs.[50]

38. Tajikistan's laws authorize the government to block internet services and limit the flow of information during a state of emergency, martial law, or during "counterterrorism operations."[51] The amended Law on the State of Emergency authorizes the government to block mobile services and access to the Internet without a court order following the announcement of a state of emergency. Amendments to the Law on Combating Terrorism adopted in 2015 allow for blocking the Internet and telecommunications systems during "counterterrorism operations," particularly if these mediums are spreading "forbidden information".[52]

[47] https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/tajikistan
[48] OpenNet Initiative, Internet Filtering in Tajikistan in 2006-2007, https://opennet.net/studies/tajikistan2007.
[49] https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/tajikistan
[50] https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-internet-censorship-surges-amid-unrest-and-tax-break-reports
[51] Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression on his mission to Tajikistan, 2017, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session35/Documents/A_HRC_35_22_Add_2_EN.docx; Eurasianet, Tajikistan adopts laws on emergency powers, spying, 2019, https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-adopts-laws-on-emergency-powers-spying.
[52] Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression on his mission to Tajikistan, 2017, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session35/Documents/A_HRC_35_22_Add_2_EN.docx.

39. On 25 November, 2021 Tajik authorities shut down access to both mobile data and most fixed-line internet access in Khorog, as protests erupted in the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan.[53] The communication blackout continued until March 2022, when communications were restored. In May 2022, authorities shut off the internet as unrest broke out in the same region.[54] Heavy internet throttling continued to take place in the region through May 2023.[55]

40. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), authorities periodically cut access to mobile and messaging services when statements critical of the president, his family, or the government appeared online. Opposition news agencies and websites located outside the country remained blocked by the government, such as independent media websites Asia-Plus, Radio Ozodi, and Bomdod.[56]

41. Popular newspapers such as Nigoh, Millat, Ozodagon, Fakty i kommentarii, Sughd, Nuri zindagi, Chomea, and Payk were all shut down during the period under review. The news agencies TojNews and Ozodagon have also suspended operations in the country.[57] Currently, two significant independent media voices remain in Asia-Plus and Radio Ozodi, which is part of the US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.[58]

42. Authorities cracked down in response to protests in the GBAO region. In June 2024, the Supreme Court banned Pamir Daily News, an independent news site and Telegram that covers the GBAO region, declaring it an "extremist organization."

43. Citizens interacting with social media have been fined. Farkhod Bekov was fined for liking a post from the publication Pamir Inside, which covers the Gorno-Badakhshan (GBAO) region.[59] This was in violation of Article 307 of the Criminal Code, for "liking" or reposting materials linked to terrorist content or banned organizations. In May 2025, Kamoliddin Sharofov was given a five-year sentence for "liking" extremist content.

44. Later that month, President Emomali Rahmon passed legislation eliminating criminal liability for expressing support of posts online, partially reversing the previous provision.[60] The adoption of the new law could be an important step

[53] https://bomdodrus.com/2021/11/30/v-gbao-do-sih-por-ne-vosstanovili-mobilnuju-svjaz-i-internet/
[54] https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/internet-severed-again-in-tajikistans-gbao/
[55] https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton-for-peace-and-democracy-in-sudan-yemen-and-tajikistan/
[56] https://cabar.asia/ru/blokirovka-sajtov-v-tadzhikistane-sud-v-pomoshh
[57] https://fergana.agency/articles/105794/
[58] https://cpj.org/2024/01/in-tajikistan-independent-media-throttled-by-state-repression/
[59] https://www.currenttime.tv/a/v-tadzhikistane-zhitelya-gornogo-badahshana-oshtrafovali-na-500-za-layk-pod-postom-s-kritikoy-vlasti-v-feysbuke/33536917.html
[60] https://www.president.tj/event/news/50795

toward protecting online human rights, and eliminating the subjective interpretation of users' online actions.[61]

PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE

45. The right to protection of privacy is guaranteed in the Constitution, where Article 23 of the Constitution guarantees "privacy of correspondence, telephone conversations, and the postal and communication rights of each person [...] except in cases prescribed by law." The Article however prohibits "the collection, storage, utilization, and dissemination of information about a person's private life without [their] consent."[62]

46. In 2017 parliament passed amendments allowing security services to monitor individuals' online activities, including by keeping records of mobile messages and social media comments. Citizens who visit "undesirable" websites are subject to surveillance, fines and detention. The legislation does not define what qualifies as an "undesirable website."[63]

RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge that freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to privacy on and offline become prominent issues in the upcoming UPR review cycle. We therefore recommend that the government of Tajikistan:

1. Repeal or amend all legislation that unduly restricts the rights of Tajik citizens, journalists, activists, and human rights defenders from expressing themselves freely online and offline and bring them in line with Tajikistan's International human rights obligations. Specifically:
   a. Repeal Section 181 of the Criminal Code on 'false publication and broadcasting
   b. Repeal Article 137 and 330 of the Criminal Code which criminalise defamation
   c. Review Articles 189 (incitement to hatred), 305 (extremism) and 307 (high treason)
   d. Restrictions on online freedom of expression must not be based on discriminatory rules against ethnic minorities, as this is incompatible with international human rights standards
2. Immediately release all journalists and individuals who are imprisoned for their legitimate exercise of their right to expression and ensure that they are granted an

[61] https://asiaplus.news/en/2025/05/14/emomali-rahmon-signs-law-abolishing-criminal-liability-for-social-media-liking-certain-posts/
[62] https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1994/32040
[63] https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/tajikistan

open and fair trial.

3. End censorship practices, particularly during protests, including internet shutdowns, throttling and blockage of independent media websites. Repeal laws that provide authorities unfettered discretion to shut down the internet and block on and offline media platforms.

4. Stop arbitrary interception, holding and use of communications, including the surveillance of citizens and journalists in violation of their right to privacy as enshrined in international law.