

URGENT ACTION

ACADEMIC RELEASED ON BAIL, STILL FACING PRISON

Prisoner of conscience Alexander Sodiqov was released on bail on 22 July in Tajikistan. He still faces a prison sentence. He has been targeted for his work as an academic researcher and for the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

PhD student **Alexander Sodiqov** was released on bail on 22 July from a pre-trial detention centre, and said he had not been ill-treated. The charges against him have not been dropped and the investigation is still ongoing.

According to media reports, he was held in connection with investigations into a charge of "high treason" under Article 305 of the Criminal Code (punishable by 12 to 20 years' imprisonment). Amnesty International believes Alexander Sodiqov was a prisoner of conscience who had been detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, as he had been undertaking legitimate academic research leading to publication for public information.

Alexander Sodiqov, resident in Canada, had been detained on 16 June by two security officials in Khorogh, capital of eastern Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). Police went into his mother's home in Dushanbe the next day, searched it and removed computer and data storage equipment. That day, the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) issued a statement accusing him of spying for foreign governments.

Please write immediately in Tajik, Russian, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to drop the charges against Alexander Sodiqov immediately;
- Urging them to guarantee the right to freedom of expression in line with their international human rights obligations, including Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

President

Emomali Rahmon
80 Rudaki Street
Dushanbe 734023
Tajikistan
Fax: +992 372 21 68 00
Email: mail@president.tj
Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General

Sherkhon Salimzoda
126, A. Sino Avenue
Dushanbe 734043, Tajikistan
(Mark faxes and emails, "Please forward to Prosecutor General")
Fax: +992 372 21 02 59
Email: info@mfa.tj
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Chairman, State Committee for National Security
Saimyrin Yatimov
State Committee for National Security
Ul Gorkogo 8
734025 Dushanbe
Tajikistan
Fax: +992 372 21 23 12

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 157/14. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR60/004/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Alexander Sodiqov is a PhD student at the University of Toronto, Canada. He had been conducting research for a British Economic and Social Research Council project called Rising Powers and Conflict Management in Central Asia, led by the universities of Exeter and Newcastle. He was detained while conducting a research interview with the deputy head of the opposition Social Democratic Party of GBAO, Alim Sherzamonov. According to Asia Plus and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Alexander Sodiqov appeared on local television in Badakhshan on the evening of 18 June and the following morning talking about the situation in GBAO. Radio Free Europe's reports said that some observers felt the television footage had been edited. On 19 June the head of the SCNS, Saimumin Yatimov, said in a statement that foreign spies were operating in Tajikistan under the guise of NGOs and trying to undermine safety and security in the country.

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is an autonomous province in eastern Tajikistan, bordering Afghanistan. It is home to only three percent of Tajikistan's population, most of whom are followers of Ismailism, a branch of Shi'ite Islam, while the rest of the Tajikistani population mainly consider themselves Sunni Muslims. Tensions between the authorities in Dushanbe and opposition political groups and local militants in GBAO have flared in the last couple of years.

In July 2012 dozens of people, including civilians, are believed to have been killed and injured in clashes between government forces and local militants in GBAO following the fatal stabbing of a security official.

Clashes on 21 May 2014 in Khorog, GBAO, left at least three people dead, including a police officer, and seven people injured. The fatalities took place during a police operation against suspected criminals and led to clashes between the security forces and local residents. On 24 May, one person was killed and two injured when protesters attacked a security forces building in Khorogh. Protesters left the central square in Khorogh on 26 May.

Amnesty International has documented cases from Tajikistan which suggest that people detained in SNCS facilities are at particular risk of human rights violations including torture and other ill-treatment, and that access to lawyers of their own choice is often denied.

Name: Alexander Sodiqov

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 157/14 Index: EUR 60/005/2014 Issue Date: 23 July 2014