

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/uzbekistan-independent-journalist-missing-23-09-2013,45213.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Uzbekistan

Missing reporter

Independent journalist missing after calling to say he was arrested

23 September 2013

Reporters Without Borders is very concerned about **Sergei Naumov**, an independent journalist based in the western city Urgench, and calls on the authorities to say where and why they are holding him. He has been missing since 21 September, when he phoned a friend to say he had been arrested.

"We are especially worried about Naumov because the highly sensitive stories he covers could result in the worst kind of reprisal in such a repressive country as Uzbekistan," Reporters Without Borders said. "His arrest could be the realization of the many warnings he has received threatening dire consequences if he did not stop.

"If it is confirmed that [Naumov is accused of robbery](#), this will undoubtedly be the latest of many cases of trumped-up charges being brought against independent journalists."

Naumov managed to call a colleague at around 6 p.m. on 21 September to say he had been arrested. But he did not have time to say where he was being transferred or why he had been arrested.

The independent Central Asian news agency [Ferghana said](#) he was arrested at around 5 p.m. at his home in Urgench, capital of the western province of Khorezm. Friends have enquired at all of the city's police stations, the prosecutor's office and at the National Security Service (SNB) without finding at any trace of him.

[According to information from sources that could not be confirmed officially](#), he is accused of snatching a gold chain from a woman at the city's station.

Naumov has been tireless in his coverage of very sensitive stories such as use of forced labour in cotton farming and the region's environmental problems. He has worked for years for [Ferghana](#), the Institute for War and Peace Reporting ([IWPR](#)), the newspaper *Ecological Security and Citizen Initiative* and the Russian magazine [Politzhurnal](#).

The winner of several media awards, he also works with human rights organizations and has participated in projects aimed at developing independent journalism.

Naumov has been harassed in the past by the authorities because of these activities. According to [IWPR](#), he was arrested in late August and questioned about his work. [Nadeida Ataeva, a human rights defender living in exile, said](#) he had received anonymous telephone and online threats.

Ferghana editor in chief Daniil Kislov told Reporters Without Borders: "Sergei Naumov has worked with us on various occasions. We know him to be an honest and upright journalist, a man who deserves respect. I think this trouble could be directly linked to his work as a journalist."

IWPR said he had been investigating the cotton harvest, which began on 16 September, and suggested that the local authorities may have wanted to "isolate" those who had credible information on the subject at a time when a government commission has been sent from Tashkent to look into the situation.

Uzbekistan is ranked 164th out of 179 countries in the [2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#). [At least nine journalists are currently in Uzbek prisons](#) on trumped-up charges.

Reporters Without Borders [recently received alarming information about the health of one of them, Solidzhon Abdurakhmanov](#), who was given a ten-year jail sentence on a drug trafficking charge in 2008.

(Photo: Ferghana)
