

Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan in the Austrian Republic
H.E. Ambassador Mr. Idibek Kalandar
Hutweidengasse 47, 1190 Vienna
AUSTRIA

Ambassador Mr. Idibek Kalandar,

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding recent reports of the unlawful arrest of Muzaffar Davlatmirov in Mountainous Badakhshan. The person of concern is a well-regarded, peaceful local leader of the Ismaili community. On the 26th of July 2022, he was arrested and taken into custody by the National Security Committee (NSC) without being informed of the charges. Only eight days later, Mr. Davlatmirov was convicted to five years imprisonment by the Badakhshan Regional Court on charges of extremist activity under Criminal Code Article 307-1. To my knowledge, there is yet to be presented any relevant evidence for these serious charges against Mr. Davlatmirov. Arbitrary arrest, prosecution without solid evidence or a fair trial and imprisonment of an innocent individual is a grave offense, not only to the person in question, but to the Tajik Criminal Code itself and the legal structures of the state.

This deeply unsettling case, Your Excellency, is unfortunately not unique. To my knowledge, there are at the time of writing at least seven individuals in Tajik prisons, jailed for exercising their lawful right to freedom of religion or belief, including 70-years-old Mr. Shamil Khakimov. In addition, civilians exercising their right to peaceful protest have been met with violence by government forces, for example in May this year, when security forces killed at least 40 individuals. In the following months, police force-closed all Ismaili prayer houses, which remain closed until this day. In addition, several reports have surfaced of harassment toward people displaying religious expressions, for example women wearing headscarves and men with beard.

There exists, however, still an opportunity for turning these extremely worrying tendencies around, for showing the world and every good citizen of Tajikistan that the highest priority of the government is the safety and well-being of its citizens. I would therefore humbly encourage you, Your Excellency, to use your influence as ambassador and forward this appeal to the respected government of Tajikistan, and urge that the right to freedom of religion or belief, assembly and expression, as stated in the Constitution of Tajikistan, as of Article 26, 29 and 30 be respected and protected for all citizens by ensuring that:

- the arbitrary detention of Muzaffar Davlatmirov be reversed, as well that his whereabouts be revealed to his family and friends;
- that all prisoners of conscience, including Muzaffar Davlatmirov and Shamil Khakimov are treated fairly and released from prison;
- the government-closed Ismaili houses of prayer in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region are reopened, and that the Ismaili community freely and without state interruption or surveillance are allowed to freely practice their faith;
- the freedom of religion or belief for all Tajik citizens is respected and protected by the state.

Sincerely,