



Norwegian  
Helsinki Committee

# TAJIKISTAN

SUBMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

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## 1. Executive summary

In its concluding observations to the second periodic report of Tajikistan in medio 2013, the Human Rights Committee pointed to a range of violations including, among others, illegal return of Tajik citizens from abroad, torture, the lacking independence of the country's courts, harassment of lawyers, lacking respect for freedom of expression and harassment of the political opposition, and urged Tajikistan to foster a culture of political plurality.

In the years since the second periodic report in 2013 the overall human rights situation in Tajikistan has, in the view of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, gravely deteriorated. Tajikistan has, in a campaign against the political opposition, completely removed the space for political plurality, by outlawing opposition groups, including the country's main opposition party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), and by imprisoning hundreds of opposition members on dubious charges without presenting credible evidence, while harassing family members of the imprisoned and opposition members abroad.

Presenting his preliminary findings upon his country visit to Tajikistan, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. David Kaye emphasized that "laws, decrees and policies" erode the constitutional right to freedom of expression "undermining the free press and intimidating journalists, limiting citizen access to government information, and blocking critical sources of information on the Internet".

During the current human rights crisis, Tajikistan has continued to harass and persecute lawyers acting as, or seeking to act as, defense counsel to opposition members, including by imprisoning on lengthy terms several lawyers and, in one instance, two sons of one lawyer, in retribution for representing opposition members. The regime has also adopted legislation further limiting the independence of the legal profession. Courts remain controlled by the executive – in cases politically sensitive sentences are prepared prior to proceedings – and function as a tool for the regime to imprison genuine and perceived critics. During the ongoing human rights crisis, torture remains widespread with perpetrators enjoying impunity. The practice of illegal return from abroad – forced return and abductions – has formidably increased in frequency since 2013 with the regime hunting down critics in countries like Russia, Turkey and others.

It is our overall impression that the brutal crackdown on the opposition in Tajikistan was an orchestrated campaign to ensure complete control of political life in the country by President Emomali Rahmon and his circle, intended to establish a regime similar to those of the region that have traditionally been more oppressive than Tajikistan. It is unfortunate that, while neighboring Uzbekistan recently has made considerable progress on pressing human rights issues, Tajikistan has chosen to move in the exact opposite direction.

This alternative report aims to give an overview of the violations summarized above, focused on the elimination of political plurality, and highlights breaches of articles 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**About the Norwegian Helsinki Committee:** The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental organization established in 1977, with headquarters in Oslo, Norway. The NHC works to promote democratic principles and respect for human rights through monitoring, reporting and support for local initiatives. The NHC opened a Regional Representation in Central Asia in 2006 and is engaged in human rights work in all five republics of the region.

The NHC follows developments in Tajikistan closely, and have made numerous statements on pressing human rights issues in the country in recent years, often together with colleagues from other international organizations.

## **2. BACKGROUND – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE TAJIK OPPOSITION**

Most human rights violations taking place during the current human rights crisis appear to be part of an offensive against all political opposition and dissent, culminating, but not ending, in the 2015 ban of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and the subsequent imprisoning of hundreds of party members. Tajikistan's political opposition has traditionally been, and in exile continues to be, Central Asia's most well-organized opposition, with the IRPT being the driving opposition force. This section gives a brief overview of the history, ideas and political profile of the groups constituting the Tajik political opposition active at the onset of the current human rights crisis, while the next section provides a detailed chronology of the deteriorating human rights situation in the years 2013-2019.

**2.1 The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan:** The IRPT grew out of a Soviet-era underground movement and was established as a political party in Soviet Tajikistan in 1990, following the creation of an All-Union Islamic Party in Astrakhan, Russia earlier that same year. While Soviet authorities rejected the party registration due to Soviet regulations banning religious movements from participating in politics, the IRPT was successfully registered as a political party in independent Tajikistan in 1991.

During the 1991 presidential elections, the IRPT entered a coalition with another opposition party, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), forming an "Islam-Democrat Coalition" to support a candidate who received some 30% of the votes.

Conflict and regional power struggles in the country led Tajikistan into civil war in 1992, which had cost the lives of 20-60 000 persons and displaced 1.2 million by the time a peace agreement was signed in 1997. The agreement established certain rules for the participation of opposition parties such as the IRPT in the political life of Tajikistan. Among other things, the agreement included provisions that 30% of executive positions should be controlled by the opposition, and the integration of opposition forces into the national military.

The IRPT represents a moderate political Islam, and has held, according to researchers such as H el ene Thibaut, a characteristically mild position on religious issues and "evolved into what today is comparable to some Christian-Democratic parties in Europe".<sup>1</sup> The party has been conscious of supporting the secular character of the state in Tajikistan, and this official position of the party has been repeatedly stated by its leadership in many different contexts. Indeed, the role of the IRPT in averting developments in a more radical religious direction has been frequently noted, as has fears that the current ban on the party could create fertile ground for extremist organizations in Tajikistan.

While elections in the country were never deemed fully democratic by international observers, Tajikistan up until the parliamentary elections in 2015 remained unique in a Central-Asian context that a religiously based opposition party held seats in parliament. While the IRPT, due to unfair elections, never gained more than two seats in the legislature, the party, had around 47 000 members, and enjoyed some degree of support from an estimated quarter of the population.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://centralasianist.libsyn.com/end-of-an-era-crackdown-on-the-islamic-renaissance-party-of-tajikistan>

Following an alleged coup attempted in August 2015, which authorities without presenting any credible evidence, linked to the party, the IRPT was declared an extremist organization by the Supreme Court and subsequently banned.

**2.2 Group 24:** Other opposition forces in Tajikistan have included the secular movement Group 24, established in Moscow by businessman and opposition leader Umarali Quvvatov in the summer of 2012. According to the movement, the goals of Group 24 are to work towards the establishment of genuine democracy in Tajikistan, including respect for human rights and rule of law and the release of political prisoners. Other priorities are to stimulate economic growth and to uproot corruption. Group 24 is a largely abroad-based movement with few active members inside Tajikistan. The group was declared extremist and banned by the Supreme Court on October 9, 2014, after its leadership called for mass protests in Dushanbe in early October of that same year.

**2.3 Zayd Saidov and the New Tajikistan Party:** In early 2013 former Industry Minister and businessman Zayd Saidov formed a new opposition party, the New Tajikistan Party. The party, centered around Saidov, was intended to promote a business-friendly climate and economic reforms and was based on political centrist thought. In April 2013 Saidov announced the creation of the party as well as his intentions to run in the presidential elections scheduled for November of the same year. Authorities arrested him on May 19, 2013, upon his return from abroad – he was later sentenced to 29 years imprisonment, on a range of trumped-up charges.

**2.4 Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan:** The Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan is a small center-left opposition party formed by former legal advisor to president Rahmon, Rahmatillo Zoirov, in 2003. The party, sometimes referred to as “the party of lawyers” has traditionally drawn its support from intellectuals in Dushanbe, Khujand and the Gorno-Badakhshan region. The party is secular, seeks democratic reforms and has attempted to form a united political opposition to the ruling regime. The Social-Democratic Party has been an active promoter of human rights – several prominent human rights defenders can be found in the party ranks, among them the imprisoned lawyers Shukhrat Kudratov (see 4.2.2) and Buzurgmehr Yorov (see 4.2.4).

### **3. 2013-2016 – A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS FROM THE ARREST OF ZAYD SAIDOV THROUGH THE BAN OF THE IRPT**

#### **3.1 2013 – Dawn of the current human rights crisis**

Shortly following his April 6, 2013 announcement of the creation of the opposition party New Tajikistan, and his intentions to run in the November 2013 presidential elections, Zayd Saidov received a death threat from an anonymous caller. On April 8 of that same year he was summoned by the Tajik security services and commanded to shelve his political ambitions and plans. On May 19, immediately upon his return from a trip to France, law-enforcement officers arrested him without a warrant.

Authorities later charged him with bigamy, kidnapping, statutory rape, fraud and bribery. On December 25, 2013 he was sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment after the court found him guilty on all charges. Next year, in October 2014 authorities charged him with forgery, abuse of office, embezzlement and tax evasion – in August 2015 a court found him guilty of all charges and added another three years to his sentence.

On July 16, 2018, the Human Rights Committee issued an opinion stating that Tajikistan has violated Saidov's rights under articles 9(1), 14(1), (2), (3)(b) and (e), 19(2) and 22(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and called on Tajikistan to "quash Mr. Saidov's conviction, release him, and if necessary, conduct a new trial, in accordance with the principles of fair hearings, presumption of innocence and other procedural safeguards; and provide Mr. Saidov with adequate compensation". The Committee furthermore marked that Tajikistan "is under an obligation to take all steps necessary to prevent similar violations from occurring in the future" – as this alternative report demonstrates, Tajikistan has failed to comply with the opinion issued by the Committee on all points.

As the Committee concluded in 2018, "Mr. Saidov was denied proper access to his lawyers and the ability to communicate with them in private". Indeed, the Tajik authorities not only violated Saidov's rights under the Covenant to proper access to his lawyers, the regime has persecuted and criminally prosecuted Saidov's legal team in retribution for their acting as legal counsel to him. In March 2014 law-enforcement officers arrested Fakhriddin Zokirov, one of Saidov's defense lawyers. He was only released after approximately eight months on the condition that he no longer represent Saidov. Authorities re-arrested Zokirov in August 2015 to release him November of that same year. On July 21, 2014 authorities arrested Shukhrat Kudratov, another of Saidov's lawyers. He was since sentenced to nine years imprisonment (Kudratov was released in winter 2018). In 2016 authorities imprisoned Firuz and Daler Tabarov, in retribution for their father's acting as legal counsel to Saidov (see 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3).

In the view of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the harassment, arrest and imprisonment of Saidov (and subsequently his legal team) were clearly an effort to keep Saidov from running in the presidential elections of November 6, 2013, thereby, in addition to the violations of the Covenant cited by the Human Rights Committee in its opinion of July 16, 2018, constituting a violation of Saidov's rights under article 25(b) of the Covenant.

### **3.2 November 6, 2013 presidential elections**

When the presidential elections took place on November 6 of that same year, president Emomali Rahmon was re-elected with 84% of the popular vote. In its final report on the elections the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that the elections lacked pluralism and genuine choice, and cited "widespread proxy voting, family voting, group voting and ballot box stuffing", as well as lacking safeguards against the misuse of state resources with the result that "the distinction between the state and ruling party was often blurred". The only genuine opposition candidate, Oynihol Bobonazarova, was barred from running in the elections, as what the OSCE/ODIHR refers to as "restrictive candidate registration" prevented her from registering her candidacy (Bobonazarova's supporters collected 202 000 signatures in support of her candidacy, 8000 short of the required 210 000. Government officials reportedly harassed Bobonazarova's supporters, hindering them in their work to collect signatures, while the Electoral Law disqualifies signatures from Tajiks based abroad, thus excluding a formidable part of the Tajik electorate).

### **3.3 Mounting pressure in run-up to 2015 parliamentary elections**

With the imprisonment of Saidov and the persecution of his defense attorneys, the circumstances surrounding and leading up to the November 6, 2013 presidential elections marked the dawn of Tajikistan's current human rights crisis. In the time leading up to the March 1, 2015 parliamentary elections, the Tajik authorities, in the view of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, prepared the ground for the ousting from parliament and, ultimately, ban, of the IRPT, as well as cracking down on any and all opposition and dissent.

**3.3.1 Smearing campaigns:** Already as the IRPT was campaigning ahead of the 2015 parliamentary elections, rumors circulated that authorities were looking to officially ban the party and its activities, and there were signs showing that, at the very least, authorities were not preparing for fair elections. Well ahead of the elections, a smearing campaign against the IRPT was launched, in the view of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, to help legitimize the ousting of parliament in the elections of the IRPT who up until the election held two seats in parliament.

Already during the fall of 2013 state-run television ran reports that appeared geared to damage the public image of the party. One such report claimed that an IRPT member was responsible for the death of an eight-year old boy. The party denied that the alleged suspect was a member of the IRPT. In February 2014 state-run television claimed that an IRPT member had raped his two step daughters. Again, the party publicly denied that the alleged suspect was a party member. The war in Syria was regularly linked to the IRPT in state media, although the IRPT is a moderate party.

Apart from state media, social media was, in the time leading up to the 2015 elections, regularly an arena used to discredit the IRPT. Typically, content would be published purportedly showing leading IRPT members in intimate situations. On November 19, 2013 a video surfaced on YouTube in which a middle-aged woman is shown kissing and having intercourse with a younger man. A narrator claims the video is showing Ghalati Barotova, grandmother of twelve and prominent IRPT member in southern Tajikistan known among her peers as a religiously devout woman. The party and Barotova deny any link between the woman shown in the video and Barotova. Another example of the smearing campaign against the party includes content presented on social media as leaked materials showing IRPT Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri purportedly coaxing a woman to his apartment. Kabiri denied any knowledge of the so-called leaked materials. As of April 2014, several videos were circulated, including by state-owned television, allegedly showing one Asadullo Karimov forcing women to commit sexual acts. Although the party denied that Asadullo Karimov was a party member, the videos linked him to the IRPT.

**3.3.2 Persecution of IRPT members:** On the backdrop of the intensifying smearing campaigns against the IRPT, the authorities lashed out against the party, harassing, detaining, intimidating and torturing party members.

**3.3.2.1 Torture and death of Umedjon Tojiev:** On October 30, 2013 law-enforcement officers in the Sughd region arrested IRPT member Umedjon Tojiev. Following his arrest, he was not allowed to see a lawyer for two weeks. While in police custody, Tojiev was tortured and reportedly subjected to sleep deprivation and electric shocks, while he was denied food and water. Reportedly a plastic bag was placed over his head. Following the torture and other ill-treatment, Tojiev threw himself out of a third-floor window of the police station, breaking both legs and some ribs. His lawyer, Fayzinisso Vokhidova (see 4.2.6), who subsequently gained access to him, said that Tojiev was carried into the meeting room, himself rendered unable to walk. Vokhidova also said that Tojiev was shaking and crying, claiming he had been forced to falsely incriminate himself. Despite his injuries, Tojiev was sent not to the hospital, but to the Khudzhand penal colony where he reportedly suffered further torture until authorities finally moved him to a hospital where he died from his injuries on January 19, 2014.

**3.3.2.2 Arrests of Saodatsho Adolatov and Abdumannon Sodikov:** On April 15, 2014 law-enforcement personnel arrested two leading members of the IRPT. Saodatsho Adolatov, regional head of the IRPT in Badakhshan was arrested and later charged under article 189 of the Criminal Code (incitement of national, racial, ethnic or racial discord) and subsequently sentenced to five years' imprisonment on the same charges. Then 40-year old Adolatov had led the IRPT branch in Badakhshan since his predecessor was killed in 2013. On April 15, 2014 authorities also arrested Abdumannon

Sodikov, a leading figure of the IRPT Isfara branch, and charged him with bribery. He was released in 2017.

**3.3.2.3 Attack on IRPT meeting:** Around two weeks after the arrests of Adolatov and Sodikov, in late April 2014, a mob descended upon and attacked an IRPT meeting in southeastern Badakhshan, injuring a number of peaceful IRPT activists.

**3.3.3 Crackdown on other opposition groups:** While the time ahead of the March 1, 2015 elections saw a mounting pressure on IRPT, other opposition groups, including Group 24, Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan and the Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan, also found themselves in the regime's crosshairs.

**3.3.3.1 Extremist designation and ban of Group 24:** In October 2014, the secular opposition movement Group 24, with its leadership at the time based in Turkey, called for public protests in Tajikistan – the group called on supporters and sympathizers to peacefully demonstrate against the regime on the streets of Dushanbe on October 10 of that same year. The regime reacted swiftly and blocked hundreds of websites and shut down SMS services for several days. On October 9, the Supreme Court declared Group 24 “extremist” and banned the group. A heavy law-enforcement presence prevented any attempts at peaceful assembly on the day of the planned protest. Authorities publicly accused the movement of plotting a coup, causing mass disorder and spreading extremist materials. Subsequently authorities arrested several individuals on accusations of Group 24 membership and would in the following months seek the extradition from abroad of others.

**3.3.3.2 Assault on, and forced return of Maksud Ibragimov:** Also, in October 2014, law-enforcement personnel in Moscow, Russia detained Maksud Ibragimov pursuant to an extradition request from Tajikistan. Ibragimov was then the leader of the mainly Moscow-based opposition group Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan. Russian legislation blocks extradition of Russian citizens and Ibragimov, being at the time a dual citizen of the Russian Federation, was released shortly after his detention. Next month, in November 2014, unknown assailants assaulted Ibragimov and inflicted six stab wounds upon him. Ibragimov survived the attack, and on January 20, was detained by officers from Moscow's Preobrazhenskaya district. They took him to a police station and told him to write a statement about the attack. Immediately upon his leaving the police station, several unknown persons kidnapped him and drove him to the airport. He later resurfaced in Tajikistan where he was arrested. On July 24, 2015 a Dushanbe court sentenced him to 17 years' imprisonment after he was found guilty on extremism charges.

**3.3.3.3 Disappearance of Nematullo Kurbonov:** On or around October 10, 2014 Nematullo Kurbonov, an activist with Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan, disappeared after returning from Russia to Tajikistan. According to information available to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee authorities charged him under article 307 of the Criminal Code.

**3.3.3.4 Detention of Abdurakhim Vosiev:** On November 12, 2014 the Moscow police detained Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan activist Abdurakhim Vosiev, following an extradition request from Tajikistan. Tajik authorities charged him with extremism in retaliation for his participating in the peaceful demonstrations organized by Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan on the territory of the Russian Federation. He was released following twelve months' detention.

**3.3.3.5 Detention of Sokhinbazar Abdunazarov and Mukrobon Sattorov:** In December 2014 Russian migration officials detained Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan activists Sokhibnazar Abdunazarov and Mukrobon Sattorov pursuant to a Tajik extradition request detailing charges under article 307 of the

Criminal Code. Russian authorities released the two on January 21, 2016 only to re-arrest them within days, ostensibly for violating migration regulations.

**3.3.3.6 Detention of Oyatullo Gilyaev and Roziya Abdurakhmonova:** Also, in December 2014, Russian migration officials detained Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan activists Oyatullo Gilyaev and Roziya Abdurakhmonova following their participating in peaceful demonstrations in Russia.

**3.3.3.7 Detention of Firdavs Sohbnazarov:** On February 4, 2015, less than a month ahead of the parliamentary elections, authorities detained Firdavs Sohbnazarov, the local leader of the Social Democratic Party in the southern Huruson district. Sohbnazarov was detained on embezzlement charges purportedly related to the disappearance of some USD 43 000 from a bank where he was employed earlier, and subsequently sent to a detention center in Kurgonteppa. Authorities informed him that he was barred from running in the upcoming parliamentary elections as he was under investigation.

### **3.4 March 1, 2015 parliamentary elections**

Following a pre-election period characterized by smearing campaigns against and attacks on the political opposition, the elections on March 1, 2015 resulted with the ousting from parliament of the IRPT who had prior to the election held two seats in parliament. In its final report the OSCE/ODIHR concluded that “the election campaign took place in a controlled environment, amid arrests of opposition politicians, candidates and election officials. Possibilities for parties and candidates to hold meetings, distribute materials, and access media, were restricted by the legal framework as well as decision of local government bodies and election commissions. The distinction between the ruling PDPT and the state was often blurred, contrary to OSCE commitments. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM received credible reports of harassment and obstruction of opposition parties, as well as pressure on voters<sup>2</sup>”.

### **3.5 Crackdown intensifies after elections**

After the March 1, 2015 elections, the political climate in Tajikistan hardened further. Opposition members, activists, news media etc. all felt the pressure intensifying – several opposition figures went into self-imposed exile in spring and summer 2015 while rumors gained traction that authorities were preparing to ban the IRPT. In the months following the elections, opposition leader Umarali Kuvvatov was executed in Istanbul while authorities imprisoned numerous opposition members.

**3.5.1 Murder of Umarali Kuvvatov:** Just four days after the elections while the world’s attention was still turned towards the February 27 murder of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, Group 24 leader Umarali Kuvvatov was poisoned and then executed with a lethal shot to the head<sup>3</sup> in front of his wife and children on an Istanbul street following lengthy efforts by Tajik authorities to have him extradited from abroad.

Kuvvatov left Tajikistan for Russia in 2012 where he made frequent televised appearances directing fierce criticism towards president Rahmon and the Tajik regime. Drawing public attention to himself and having gained a certain mass of followers, Kuvvatov feared that Russian authorities may extradite him to Tajikistan leading him to relocate to Dubai in 2012. In December 2012, authorities in Dubai detained Kuvvatov pursuant to an extradition request from Tajikistan. United Arab Emirates released Kuvvatov after ten months’ detention, and he relocated to Kazakhstan before seeking refuge in Kyrgyzstan. Claiming that Tajik authorities attempted to kidnap him in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Kuvvatov fled to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/tajikistan/158081?download=true>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhc.no/nhc-condemns-murder-of-tajik-opposition-leader/>



Turkey where he applied for asylum with the United Nations refugee agency. In December 14, police in Istanbul detained Kuvvatov for alleged visa violations. In January 2015 Tajikistan sent an extradition request detailing charges of extremism, fraud and of taking a hostage. Turkish authorities released Kuvvatov on February 3 of that same year.

On March 5, a Tajik citizen residing in Istanbul invited Kuvvatov with family to dinner. Shortly after the meal the family felt ill and got up to leave. Once on the street an unknown attacker executed Kuvvatov with a shot to the back of his head, with Kuvvatov's wife and two young sons as witnesses. Following the murder of Kuvvatov, his wife and children were hospitalized and diagnosed with food poisoning. The Istanbul-based Council of Forensic Medicine confirmed that clozapine – a drug used to treat schizophrenia – was found in Kuvvatov's blood, supporting the family's claims that they were poisoned during dinner.

**3.5.2 Imprisonment of Umedjon Salikhov:** On March 4, 2015 Umedjon Salikhov was sentenced to 17 years and six months imprisonment after a court in Dushanbe found him guilty on various extremism charges. Salikhov, based in Russia, was pressured to return to Tajikistan in October 2014 when Tajik security services threatened to prosecute his relatives. Accused of Group 24 membership, Salikhov denied any connection to the group.

**3.5.3 Imprisonment of Firdavs Mukhiddinov and Farhod Karimov:** On March 14, 2015 a Dushanbe court sentenced Firdavs Mukhiddinov and Farhod Karimov to 16 years and six months imprisonment on various extremism charges. Karimov, denying Group 24 membership, confessed only to having an insulting photograph of president Rahmon on his computer, while Mukhiddin had participated in one demonstration in Novosibirsk organized by Group 24.

**3.5.4 Imprisonment of Mukhammadrizoi Shamzoda, Makhmadali Jobirov Shamshullo Rakhimov, Ilhomiddin Aliev and Ilhomiddin Allanazarov:** On April 8, 2015 Mukhammadrizoi Shamzoda and Makhmadali Jobirov were sentenced to three years and six months' imprisonment for their alleged activities in Group 24. The same year authorities furthermore imprisoned Group 24 activists Shamshullo Rakhimov (eight years and six months), Ilhomiddin Aliev (three years) and Ilhomiddin Allanazarov (three years) for alleged Group 24-related activities.

**3.5.5 Disappearance of Ekhsan Odinaev:** On May 19, 2015 Ekhsan Odinaev left his apartment in Russia never to be seen again. At the time of his disappearance he was a young blogger known for his critical views of the Tajik government. He was also a member of both Group 24 and Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan. Prior to his disappearance Tajik authorities had declared him wanted for cybercrimes.

**3.5.6 Detention of Shabnam Khudoydodova:** On July 15, 2015 Belarusian authorities detained Group 24-member Shabnam Khudoydodova after Polish border guards denied her entry onto the territory of Poland. She was released after eight months' detention in Belarus following an international campaign to set her free.

**3.5.7 Detention of Sobir Valiev:** On August 11, 2015 police in Chisinau, Moldova detained Group 24 deputy leader Sobir Valiev at the request of Tajik authorities who sought his extradition on charges of extremism. Following pressure from international rights groups, Moldovan authorities released him after two months.

**3.5.8 IRPT status revoked:** On August 28, 2015, the Ministry of Justice revoked the IRPT's status as a national party on formal grounds that national parties are required to have primary party organizations in "most towns and districts", requirements the IRPT, according to the Ministry of Justice, failed to comply with.

### 3.6 Events of September 4, 2015 – alleged coup attempt

On the morning of September 4, 2015 violent clashes took place between government forces and militants loyal to deputy defense minister Abdulhalim Nazarzoda, when fighters attacked police checkpoints in Vakhdat and Dushanbe. 14 law-enforcement officers and 25 militants were killed in the clashes. The authorities claimed the violent events were an attempted coup carried out by Nazarzoda on the direct orders of IRPT chairman Mukhiddin Kabiri, but never presented any credible evidence of either an attempted coup or any link between the violent events and the IRPT. Following the events, the European Union issued a statement saying it was "deeply troubled by the Tajik Government's association of these events with the IRPT"<sup>4</sup>.

In an article published on September 23, 2015, Tajikistan researcher Dr. Edward Lemon presents an alternative narrative: "Nazarzoda himself has given a different version of events. On September 3, he lost his job for forging documents. According to a statement released by his supporters on September 6, the regime plotted to remove Nazarzoda for refusing to agree with the recent banning of the IRPT. When he heard that he was going to be targeted, he assembled supporters and decided to fight his way out"<sup>5</sup>. However, verifiable information about the true nature of the events is not publicly available, as Special Rapporteur David Kaye remarked "the events themselves are shrouded in mystery and extremely limited public information of independent confirmation"<sup>6</sup>. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is of the view that the government sought to limit information on the events in order to control the narrative in a bid to pin the events on the IRPT and legitimize an intensified crackdown on the party.

### 3.7 Aftermath of alleged coup attempt

In the aftermath of the September 4 events, authorities enforced the narrative of the IRPT as an extremist and terrorist group responsible for the violence, paving the way for a definite crackdown on the party, as laws regarding extremism and terrorism in Tajikistan remain vague. As Special Rapporteur Mr. David Kaye pointed out "the counter-terrorism and extremism laws do not sufficiently define 'extremism' or 'terrorism', investing broad discretion to the Prosecutor General"<sup>7</sup>.

**3.7.1 Extremist/terrorist designation and ban of IRPT:** Under this pretext, authorities started mass-arresting IRPT members, including 13 leading members, on September 16. On September 17, the Prosecutor General issued a statement stating that the IRPT members had been arrested to prevent new terrorist acts and further pinning the September 4 events on the party. On September 22, the Prosecutor General submitted a request to the Supreme Court to declare the party an extremist and terrorist organization, and to ban it. Although court proceedings against the IRPT leadership for alleged involvement in the violent events would not commence until the following year, the Supreme Court on September 29, 2015 concluded that "for the purpose of seizing and thus preserving power and overthrowing the constitutional order in the Republic of Tajikistan, which is contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Mukhiddin Kabiri and other members of the Supreme Management of the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.osce.org/pc/197851?download=true>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13279-violence-in-tajikistan-emerges-from-within-the-state.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17193&LangID=E>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17193&LangID=E>

IRPT, in preliminary agreement with former deputy Minister of Defense Nazarzoda Abdukhalim Mirzo, created more than 20 criminal groups consisting of former military opposition members that included 15-30 person” and thus declared the IRPT an extremist and terrorist organization, and subsequently banned the party, the party newspaper Najot, ordered the closure of the party’ website and prohibited the import and distribution of the party’s audio and video recordings, newspapers, literature and party flyers.

**3.7.2 Arrest, torture and imprisonment of Mahmatali Hayit:** Among those 13 IRPT leaders arrested in September 2015 was IRPT deputy chairman Mahmatali Hayit. He was reportedly tortured at the hands of the security services following his arrest. Two years prior to his arrest, in April 2013, Hayit was hospitalized after two unknown attackers brutally beat him outside his home after he returned home from an IRPT meeting. On June 2, 2016 the Tajik Supreme Court found him guilty on charges of attempting to overthrow the government and sentenced him to life in prison. The court proceedings were deeply flawed, and the prosecution did not present any credible evidence linking Hayit or any of his co-defendants to the September 4 events.

When his wife visited him in prison on March 9, 2019 Hayit showed her injuries on his forehead and stomach, which he told her were caused by prison officials beating him. Hayit, suffering from liver and kidney problems, told his wife that prison officials have regularly beat him during his three-year imprisonment, and that he is kept in a tiny, dirty cell with other prisoners. On February 6, he suffered an episode related to his heart, but received no medical care. Talking to his wife, he said he believes he might not survive another six months’ imprisonment if the current abuse continues. In May 2018 the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an opinion stating that Hayit’s detention is arbitrary<sup>8</sup> and called for his immediate release.

**3.7.3 Arrest, torture and imprisonment of Umarali Husaynov:** Umarali Husaynov (also known as Saidumar Khusaini) was also arrested on September 16, 2015. Two weeks after his arrest, his lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov told the press that authorities had tortured Husaynov in detention. On June 2, 2016 the Supreme Court sentenced him to life after he was found guilty on charges of attempting to overthrow the government. Shortly after his lawyer, Buzurgmehr Yorov, announced to the press that Husaynov had been tortured, authorities arrested him (Yorov). Yorov is now serving a 29-year sentence in retribution for acting as legal counsel to Husaynov and other opposition figures (see 4.2.4).

**3.7.4 Arrest, torture and imprisonment of Rahmatullo Rajab:** Rahmatullo Rajab a senior party member, was also arrested on September 16, 2015. He was reportedly tortured by the security services upon his detention. Prison officials have threatened to arrest Rajab’s son if his family speak out about the ill-treatment he is subjected to. On June 2, 2016 the Supreme Court sentenced him to 28 years’ imprisonment. In early December 2016, prison officials placed him in solitary confinement and beat him brutally. The officials told him that the beatings would cease if his exiled son, who is a journalist, would “stay quiet”.

**3.7.5 Arrest, imprisonment and killing of Sattor Karimov:** Sattor Karimov, another senior IRPT member, was likewise arrested on September 16, 2015 and sentenced to 28 years’ imprisonment on June 2, 2016. He perished in a prison riot in Vakhdat on May 19, 2019 (see 5.4.3).

**3.7.6 Arrest and imprisonment of Kiyomiddin Avaz and Abdukahori Davlat:** Kiyomiddin Avaz and Abdukahori Davlat, also senior IRPT members, were arrested on September 16, 2015, and sentenced to 28 years’ imprisonment on June 2, 2016.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session81/A\\_HRC\\_WGAD\\_2018\\_2.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session81/A_HRC_WGAD_2018_2.pdf)

**3.7.7 Arrest and imprisonment of other IRPT leaders:** Other party leaders arrested on September 16, 2015 and sentenced on June 2, 2016 include Zubaidollohi Rozik (25 years' imprisonment), Muhamadali Fayzmuhammad (23 years' imprisonment), Vokhidin Kossidin (20 years' imprisonment), Sadiddini Rustam (20 years' imprisonment), Hikmatullo Sayfullozoda (16 years' imprisonment), Muhammadshariv Nabiev (14 years' imprisonment), Abdusamad Gayratov (14 years' imprisonment) and Zarafo Rahmoni (two years' imprisonment, released early).

#### **4. Attacks on legal profession:**

During the current human rights crisis, the Tajik authorities have harassed and imprisoned on lengthy terms several lawyers in retribution for their acting or seeking to act, as defense counsel to opposition members. In 2015 a bill was signed into law that puts further strain on the independence of the legal profession.

**4.1 New law regulation legal profession:** On March 18, 2015 the new bill regulating the legal profession was signed into law in Tajikistan. According to the International Commission of Jurists, the law includes several problematic provisions including requirements that all practicing lawyers renew their license with the Qualification Commission under the Justice Ministry and with the lawyers' association<sup>9</sup>, thereby threatening the independence of the qualification process. Indeed, the International Commission of Jurists cites allegations that the Qualification Commission has arbitrarily prevented some candidates from qualifying. The new law also excludes from the legal profession any individual convicted of a crime, and "anyone whose appointment to or employment with State bodies, judicial bodies, bodies of the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor's Office, advokatura, other law enforcement bodies, military service has been terminated for violation of the professional oath and committing actions of a corrupt character".

**4.2 Persecution of legal professionals:** In its concluding observations in 2013, the Human Rights Committee cited harassment of lawyers as one of several human rights issues in Tajikistan. In the years since 2013, Tajikistan has continued to harass legal professionals and started imprisoning lawyers defending members of the opposition.

**4.2.1 Arrest and re-arrest of Fakhridin Zokirov:** On March 6, 2014 law-enforcement officials arrested defense lawyer Fakhridin Zokirov on fraud charges. At the time of his arrest, Zokirov was acting as defense counsel to opposition leader Zayd Saidov. Authorities released Zokirov after eight months' detention on the condition that he would cease defending Saidov. Then, on August 21, 2015, authorities re-arrested him on charges of extortion. Zokirov denied all allegations against himself. In November, authorities released him after he paid a fine of approximately USD 2000.

**4.2.2 Arrest and imprisonment of Shukhrat Kudratov:** On July 21, 2014 authorities arrested human rights lawyer Shukhrat Kudratov, another member of Zayd Saidov's legal team. On January 13, 2015 he was sentenced to nine years imprisonment after a Dushanbe court found him guilty of bribery and fraud. On August 24, 2018, authorities released Kudratov. Due to his conviction, he is disqualified to practice as a lawyer, in line with the changes in the law of 2015.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Tajikistan-Independence-of-legal-profession-Publications-Reports-Thematic-reports-2016-ENG.pdf>

**4.2.3 The case of Ekhsan Tabarov:** On June 12, 2016, Ekhsan Tabarov died in hospital. He was the third member of Zayd Saidov's legal team. Tabarov's health rapidly deteriorated during the last two months of his life after authorities imprisoned two of his sons in retribution for his acting as defense counsel to Saidov. In February 2016, authorities imprisoned his son, Firouz Tabarov for 13 years and six months on charges of promoting anti-state propaganda. On June 2, 2016, authorities imprisoned another of his sons, Daler Tabarov, for six months on charges of failure to report an unspecified crime.

**4.2.4 Arrest, torture and imprisonment of Buzurgmehr Yorov:** On September 28, 2015, authorities arrested defense lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov who was the lawyer of seven of the arrested IRPT members. On the day prior to his arrest, Yorov told reporters in Dushanbe that authorities had tortured one of his clients, IRPT deputy chairman Saidumar Husaynov, in pre-trial detention. Authorities charged him with swindling and fraud, allegedly taking place in 2010, and, in December 2015, added charges of incitement of national, racial, local, or religious discord and extremism. Upon his arrest, law-enforcement personnel confiscated all documents relating to the defense of the arrested IRPT members. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has received credible information that Yorov was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in pre-trial detention.

On October 14, 2015, authorities declared Yorov's case "top secret" thereby confining the court proceedings to behind closed doors. On October 6, 2016, Yorov was sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment following court proceedings closed to the public. On March 16, 2017, a court added a further two years to his sentence for contempt of court and for insulting an official, after he read aloud a classic Tajik poem during the first court proceedings against him. Then, on August 18 of that same year, he was found guilty of further charges – fraud and publicly insulting the president – and sentenced him to an additional twelve years' imprisonment. The combined sentenced for Yorov has been set to 28 years.

Before taking on the defense of the arrested IRPT members, Yorov was already a well-known defense lawyer often engaged in sensitive cases. Prior to his arrest Yorov defended his above-mentioned legal colleague, Fakhriddin Zokirov, as well as Umedjon Salikhov, who was sentenced to 17 years and six months' imprisonment on extremism charges in connection with his alleged membership in the outlawed movement Group 24.

**4.2.5 Arrest and imprisonment of Nuriddin Makhkamov:** On October 22, 2015, Tajik police arrested lawyer Nuriddin Makhkamov, a lawyer who since his colleague's arrest, had sought to act as defense counsel to Buzurgmehr Yorov. Like Yorov, Makhkamov was also charged with swindling, incitement of discord and extremism. Together with Yorov, Makhkamov was found guilty of the charges on October 6, 2016 – he was sentenced to 21 years' imprisonment.

**4.2.6 Harassment and travel ban of Fayziniiso Vokhidova:** On May 14, 2017, Tajik border guards prevented well-known human rights lawyer Fayziniiso Vokhidova from leaving the country, enforcing a travel ban she was placed under by the Tajik regime. Authorities eventually rescinded the travel ban, but continued to routinely harass and interrogate Vokhidova, who regularly expressed critical views. Vokhidova passed away from pneumonia in hospital on January 4, 2019.

## **5. Developments after the ban of the IRPT**

### **5.1 May 22, 2016 referendum**

With the political opposition outlawed, imprisoned and forced into exile, there was no political force left in Tajikistan to oppose a May 2016 referendum consolidating the ruling regime's grip of power in Tajikistan. On May 22, voters were to vote over a package of 41 amendments to the constitution. According to the authorities, 96,6% voted in favor of the amendments. The OSCE/ODIHR did not observe the referendum. Among the proposed amendments, three changes were of particular significance.

**5.1.2 Lowering the minimum age of the president:** Following the referendum, the required minimum age to become president of the republic of Tajikistan is lowered from 35 to 30. When president Emomali Rahmon's current term ends in 2020, his oldest son, Rustam Emomali (b. 1987) is thus eligible to run for president. Rustam Emomali is currently the mayor of Dushanbe, holds the rank of major general in the military, and has served as head of Tajikistan's anti-corruption agency.

**5.1.3 Lifting presidential term limits:** Another significant change to the constitution, as of the May 2016 referendum, is the lifting of presidential term limits. Prior to the referendum, the constitution set a limit of two presidential terms, with the implication that current president Emomali Rahmon would be required to leave office in 2020. The 2016 amendments allows Rahmon to serve as president indefinitely.

**5.1.4 Banning faith-based parties:** Another significant amendment to the constitution involves a ban of political parties based on a religious platform implicating a definite break with the 1997 inter-Tajik peace accords (a 1999 referendum opened for religiously based parties to allow for political participation of the IRPT as heir to the United Tajik Opposition).

## **5.2 Arrests, extraditions 2016-2019 (including misuse of Interpol)**

While Interpol's Constitution states that the system cannot be used for political purposes, the Tajik government has several times attempted to abuse Interpol in order to forcibly return some individuals to the country, including the chairman of the IRPT, Muhiddin Kabiri. Kabiri's name was posted on the Interpol website in September 2017, as "Wanted by the judicial authorities of Tajikistan for prosecution/to serve a sentence".<sup>10</sup> Kabiri was also briefly detained at Istanbul Airport for this reason, but Turkish authorities decided to ignore the request and eventually let Kabiri pass unhindered. After receiving asylum in a European country, Interpol removed the "Red Notice" on Kabiri on 2 March 2018.

**5.2.1 Imprisonment of Said Qiyomiddin Ghozi:** During the last week of May 2018, the Supreme Court, following proceedings closed to the public, sentenced Tajik cleric and prominent IRPT member Said Qiyomiddin Ghozi to 25 years' imprisonment. The Supreme Court found him guilty under charges of incitement of national, racial, ethnic or religious discord, public calls to overthrow the government and high treason. In late November 2017, Ghozi was returned from Moscow to Tajikistan. In February 2019, the Supreme Court reduced his sentence to seven years, ostensibly because he had shown repentance and assisted in clearing up grave crimes. On June 18, 2018 Tajik state television aired a broadcast in which Ghozi publicly denounced the IRPT. He perished during the May 19, 2019 prison riot in Khujand.

**5.2.2 Arrest and imprisonment of journalist Khayrullo Mirsaidov:** On December 5, 2017, authorities arrested independent journalist Khayrullo Mirsaidov after he had sent an open letter to president Rahmon on corruption in government bodies. On July 11, 2018 the Khujand City Court found him guilty of embezzlement, forgery and giving false testimony, and sentenced him to 12 years' imprisonment. Following a broad international campaign to free Mirsaidov, the Sughd Regional Court overturned his

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<sup>10</sup> <http://enews.fergananews.com/articles/2999>

sentence and released him without exonerating him on August 22, 2018. He has since been sentenced in absentia to eight months' imprisonment for having left the country unauthorized.

**5.2.3 Seeking the extradition of Parviz Tursunov:** On September 18, 2018, Belarusian migration police detained Parviz Tursunov at Minsk International Airport pursuant to a Tajik extradition request. Tursunov found himself in the authorities' crosshairs in 2011, when he, then a professional football player, was ousted from the Khayr football team after he refused to shave his beard. He later relocated to the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, before deciding to travel to Europe through Belarus in September 2018. Following international attention to Tursunov's case, Belarusian authorities dismissed Tajikistan's extradition request and released him.

**5.2.4 Forced return of Namunjon Sharipov:** On February 16, 2018, Turkish authorities delivered IRPT activist Namunjon Sharipov to Tajik officials in Istanbul. The latter took him to the airport and forced him onto a plane to Tajikistan. Turkish police initially detained him on February 5 of that same year. Following three days' detention by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Sharipov was released.

**5.2.5 Forced return, torture and release of Sharofiddin Gadoev:** On February 14, 2019, Russian security officials abducted, blindfolded and beat Tajik activist Sharofiddin Gadoev, before forcing him onto a plane to Tajikistan, inside which Tajik security officials took custody of him. In the airplane, the Tajik officials placed a bag over his head. Upon arrival he was detained by the Interior Ministry. In Tajikistan, officials forced Gadoev to record videos stating he had voluntarily returned to Tajikistan. After massive international attention, Tajik authorities released Gadoev and allowed him to leave the country. He was back in Europe on March 2, 2019. Gadoev, residing in Europe, is an activist with Group 24. He claims he was lured to Moscow by Russian security officials telling him he would participate in a political dialogue about the future of Tajikistan.

### 5.3 Family Persecution

During the current human rights crisis, most government critics and opposition members have either been imprisoned or driven into exile. Notwithstanding the current crackdown on the opposition, the remaining Tajik opposition, although exiled, remains well organized and active outside the country. Apart from seeking the extradition of abroad-based opposition members, Tajik authorities typically retaliate against their relatives remaining inside Tajikistan.

**5.3.1 Family persecution related to 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting:** During the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of 2016, which took place from September 19-30, several Tajik activists in exile participated, sharing stories of government persecution. Activists also organized a silent protest at the meeting, showing placards of imprisoned opposition members. Reacting to the participation of Tajik activists and opposition members at the meeting, the Tajik delegation left the conference on September 22, protesting that the OSCE had opened for the participation of the opposition. After some of the protests organized by the Tajik activists at the conference, their relatives back home were harassed and intimidated.

**5.3.1.1 Persecution of family of Ilhomjon Yakubov:** On September 20, 2016 authorities in Khujand detained overnight the mother, brother and sisters of exiled IRPT member Ilhomjon Yakubov. In detention, they were interrogated and intimidated by security officials who threatened to "destroy them" if Yakubov would continue to publicly criticize the regime. Then, on September 22, a crowd of approximating 200 people descended on the family home in Khujand, hurling abuse labeling Yakubov an enemy of the people, a terrorist and a traitor. According to eye-witness reports, some members of the

crowd unsuccessfully tried to break into the family home. The crowd returned the next day with some members of the mob throwing rocks at the family home and once again attempting unsuccessfully to break in. On September 26, officials threatened the family that they would confiscate their property in the case that Yakubov would not voluntarily return to Tajikistan. On September 27, once again a crowd gathered outside the family home, shouting abuse. In the following months, several of Yakubov's relatives were forced to flee from Tajikistan as pressure mounted on them. The security service also confiscated the property of some of his relatives.

**5.3.1.2 Persecution of family of Shabnam Khudoydodova:** On September 20, a crowd gathered in the class room of activist Shabnam Khudoydodova's (see 3.5.6) then nine-year-old daughter, taunted her and followed her home. Then, a "demonstration", took place outside the family home with the crowd shouting that Khudoydodova should be prosecuted. The next day, the mob returned, this time hurling rocks at the house with some crowd members breaking into the home. At least three of Khudoydodova's relatives were beaten by the mob. Members of the mob also threatened to burn the house down.

**5.3.1.3 Persecution of family of Vaisiddin Odinaev:** Following his presentation at a side-event on the conference, the Dushanbe-based relatives of Vaisiddin Odinaev were interrogated and harassed by authorities in Tajikistan. At the event, Odinaev spoke, among other things, about the disappearance in Russia of his brother, Ekhsan Odinaev (see 4.4), an activist with Group 24 and Youth for the Revival of Tajikistan.

**5.3.2 Family persecution continues in second half of 2016:** Through the second half of 2016, authorities in Tajikistan continued to persecute family members of outspoken abroad-based critics.

**5.3.2.1 Persecution of family of Shukhrat Rahmatullo:** In early December 2016, prison officials subjected imprisoned IRPT leader Rahmatullo Rajab (see 3.7.4) to brutal beatings. They let him know that he was being beaten as retribution for his son's reporting. Rajab's son, Shukhrat Rahmatullo, is an abroad-based journalist with the opposition TV station Payom.net, well known for reporting on political developments inside Tajikistan. While beating Rajab, prison officials told him the beatings would end if his son would "stay quiet".

**5.3.2.2 Continued persecution of family of Vaisiddin Odinaev:** On December 6, 2016, law-enforcement officials in Hissar, Tajikistan, detained then 75-year-old Kudrat Oev and subsequently interrogated him for five hours. Oev is the grandfather of exiled Tajik activist Vaisiddin Odinaev (see 5.3.1.3) who had recently peacefully demonstrated against the Tajik regime during a December 1 state visit of president Rahmon to Prague. Oev is also the grandfather of disappeared Tajik activist Ekhsan Odinaev (see 4.4).

**5.3.3 Family persecution related to 2017 Dortmund event:** On July 9, 2017 a number of exiled Tajik opposition activists attended a conference in Dortmund, Germany marking the twentieth anniversary of the Tajik Peace Accords. In the days prior to and following the event, state officials harassed family members of the opposition activists at the conference.

**5.3.3.1 Persecution of family of Jannatulloh Komilov:** In Dangara on July 7, 2017 law-enforcement officials intimidated the family of Germany-based opposition activist Jannatulloh Komilov and threatened to confiscate the family home. Two days later police detained Komilov's father in low overnight.

**5.3.3.2 Persecution of family of Bobojon Kayumov:** In Kulob, the security service threatened to demolish the family home of exiled IRPT member Bobojon Kayumov, unless the latter would cease his



opposition activities. They also forced his parents to record a video in which they condemned their son and his activities.

**5.3.3.3 Persecution of family of Jamshed Yorov:** In Vahdat, on the day following the Dortmund event, the security service threatened to rape the 15-year-old daughter of Jamshed Yorov, a Germany-based lawyer and the brother of imprisoned lawyer Buzurgmehr Yorov (see 4.2.4).

**5.3.3.4 Persecution of family of Islomiddin Saidov:** On July 8, the security service detained the father of Poland-based IRPT member Islomiddin Saidov, interrogated him and leveled threatened to take “necessary actions” against Saidov. On July 9 and 10, officials berated his father in front of a group of so-called concerned citizen.

State officials furthermore harassed and threatened family members of exiled activists in the Khatlon Region, in Khujand, in Rudaki and in Dushanbe.

**5.3.4 Travel ban on activist’s daughter:** On August 4, 2018, the daughter and mother of Shabnam Khudoydodova, an independent Tajik activist in exile, boarded a plane in the Dushanbe airport. Their ultimate destination was Warsaw, where they were to reunite with Khudoydodova who has political asylum in Poland. Before the plane took off, officers from the security services entered the plane and removed them from the flight. They were subsequently interrogated for hours, told they were on a list of wanted persons and banned from leaving the country. Following international attention to the travel ban, Tajik authorities, on August 11, 2018, gave them new tickets and allowed them to leave the country.

**5.3.5 Travel ban on IRPT chairman’s grandson:** Four-year old Ibrohim Hamza Tilozoda is the grandson of IRPT chairman Mukhiddin Kabiri and the son of IRPT member Ruhullo Tilozoda. Hamza has been suffering from cancer for several years, and in 2018 his prognosis looked bleak. The cancer was life threatening and doctors in Tajikistan unable to successfully treat him. The family and medical experts abroad considered treatment abroad the only way to save his life. Tajik authorities confiscated the family’s travel documents in late 2015, placing a de-facto travel ban on them. After international pressure the Tajik authorities issued the family travel documents and allowed them to leave the country.

## 5.4 Violent events 2016-2019

**5.4.1 July 29, 2018 terror attacks:** In a tragic event on July 29, 2018 five Islamic extremists attacked and killed four western touring cyclists and injured a further two. The attackers drove their car into the foreign cyclists and then exited the car and proceeded to stab the victims. Following the attack, the Islamic State news agency published a video in which the five attackers pledge allegiance to Islamic State caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Tajik authorities, however, attempted to pin the attack on the IRPT, without presenting any credible evidence. The Prosecutor General issued a statement alleging that the attackers, in a bid to “remove suspicions from the terrorist organization Islamic Revival Party” carried out the terrorist act under cover of allegiance to the Islamic State<sup>11</sup>.

**5.4.2 November 7, 2018 prison riot:** Close to midnight on November 7, 2018 a prison riot broke out in high-security prison No. 3/3 in the northern city of Khujand. Circumstances surrounding the riot remain unclear as the Tajik government has not allowed for an independent investigation into the events and has not released much information on the riot. On November 22, at a press conference in Brussels, Tajik

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.prokuratura.tj/en/news-eng/848-zayavlenie-generalnoj-prokuratury-respubliki-tadzhikistan-18.html>

Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhridin told reporters that 25 people died during the violence, including 21 rioters who were “neutralized” during the riot, two inmates who were killed while trying to help prison guards and two law-enforcement officers killed by the rioters<sup>12</sup>. Shortly after the riot, the Islamic State claimed responsibility<sup>13</sup>.

**5.4.3 May 19, 2019 prison riot:** Some time after 7:30 pm on May 19, 2019, gunshots were heard from by visitors outside a prison in Vakhdat in Tajikistan. Inside the prison, violent riots had erupted that would, according to official sources, leave 32 dead, including 29 inmates and three prison guards. Tajik authorities have not allowed an independent investigation into the events but claim that Islamic State fighters incarcerated in the prison started the riot<sup>14</sup>. According to a list<sup>15</sup> published by the Interior Ministry, 17 of the deceased were convicted members of the Islamic State, while three members of the IRPT were killed. The killed IRPT members were Sattor Karimov, an IRPT leader who was sentenced to 28 years on June 2, 2016; Said Qiyomiddin Ghozi, who was sentenced to 25 years in May 2018; and Jomahmad Boev, a young IRPT member who was sentenced to 18 years on August 23, 2015. Opposition figure Zayd Saidov, leader of the unregistered party New Tajikistan, is an inmate of the same prison, but was not harmed during the riots.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/six-officers-of-tajik-prison-arrested-after-deadly-prison-unrest-sources/29613500.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/is-says-behind-deadly-tajik-prison-riot/29591609.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/29951879.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://vkd.tj/index.php/tj/ruydodho/23811-r-jkhat>