

Tajikistan lawyer wrongfully held for a decade



Palace of the Nation in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Tajikistan's authorities have wrongfully imprisoned a human rights lawyer for ten years for exercising his human rights, 12 organisations (including Civil Rights Defenders) said today. Buzurgmehr Yorov is serving a 23-year prison sentence because of his work representing political opposition leaders.

Tajikistan's authorities should quash Yorov's conviction and sentence and release him immediately. The authorities should also release all other prisoners, including lawyers, arbitrarily and unjustifiably detained for peacefully exercising their human rights.

Yorov, 54, earned a reputation as one of the most fearless human rights lawyers in Tajikistan by taking on high-profile legal cases, representing individuals prosecuted by the government on politically motivated charges. In early September 2015, Yorov began representing several members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. The party had been one of the few officially registered opposition parties in the country, but it was [labeled a terrorist organisation and banned](#) in September 2015.

On 28 September 2015, police [arrested Yorov](#), raided his home and legal office without a warrant, and ultimately charged him with forgery, fraud, 'arousing national, racial, local or religious hostility', and extremism. The charges appear to have been prompted by [an interview](#) Yorov gave shortly before his arrest in which he announced that one of his clients had been tortured in pre-trial detention and called for a coalition of lawyers to join him in representing the detained Islamic Renaissance Party members.

Yorov was held in pre-trial detention for eight months, where he was [beaten and held in solitary confinement](#). On 6 October 2016, after a trial riddled with due process violations, he was [sentenced to 23 years in prison](#). Since then, his sentence has twice been shortened under mass amnesties. However, authorities have repeatedly brought [new, trumped-up charges](#) against him—most recently in July 2023. The ensuing convictions have extended his sentence and pushed his expected release date to September 2043, by which time he will be 72 years old.

Like Yorov's first trial, those that followed were rife with violations of fair-trial rights, including prohibiting Yorov from freely communicating with or receiving the assistance of counsel or presenting his own defense.

Yorov has been severely mistreated and even [tortured](#) in prison, and held incommunicado. The authorities have restricted visits from his wife and reportedly pressured his family not to advocate on his behalf. In May 2019, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [issued an opinion](#) stating that Tajikistan's detention and treatment of Yorov violated international law and called for his immediate release. Nevertheless, he remains in prison.

Yorov's detention and abuse are indicative of a [broader human rights crisis](#) in Tajikistan. Under the decades-long rule of President Emomali Rahmon, the rule of law has been weakened in the country and the authorities have become increasingly repressive. The decline accelerated further after November 2021, when the authorities initiated a violent campaign to repress protests in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, wiping out independent media and civil society in the region.

Dozens of lawyers, civic activists, journalists, community leaders, and others have been arrested and persecuted for politically motivated reasons in recent years, including journalists [Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva](#), [Mamadsulton Mavlonazarov](#) and [Ruhshona Khakimova](#), as well as human rights lawyer [Manuchehr Kholiknazarov](#).

Tajikistan's authorities should release Yorov immediately and unconditionally and release all other prisoners jailed on politically motivated charges. The government should abide by its obligations under international law to protect everyone's free and peaceful exercise of their human rights.

Tajikistan's international partners should use bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to raise Yorov's case and insist on his release.

This joint statement was signed by:

- Araminta
- Amnesty International
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Civil Rights Defenders
- Freedom Now
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
- Human Rights Watch
- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Partnership for Human Rights
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
- Norwegian Helsinki Committee