

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 29, 2020

His Excellency Emomali Rahmon
President of the Republic of Tajikistan
Palace of the Nation
Dushanbe
Republic of Tajikistan

Dear President Rahmon:

We are writing to request that you release detainees currently serving sentences for peacefully expressing their views, including members of student groups, activists, and human rights defenders. Individuals should never be imprisoned for exercising their rights of freedom of assembly, association, and speech, and we urge you to release without preconditions your citizens currently in detention for these legitimate acts.

We call for releasing these individuals on the merits of their cases, but today, we also urge you to act quickly on health and humanitarian grounds. While all nations and citizens have been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the risks to the detainee population are particularly acute given the enclosed living conditions. Our own country, like many others, has taken the extraordinary step to grant some prisoners early release in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. This move allows facilities to increase their ability to follow social distancing recommendations and ensure standards of medical care for the remaining population.

We encourage you to seize this opportunity during this global crisis by releasing these individuals. While we write regarding all individuals detained in relation to acts of peaceful expression, we draw your attention to two cases in particular:

First, we understand that **Buzurgmehr Yorov** was arrested in September 2015 on fraud-related charges and attempts to “change the constitutional system by violence” (Article 307 of Criminal Code). He was arrested after he announced that one of his legal clients, an imprisoned member of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), was being tortured. In October 2015, a Tajik court sentenced Yorov to 23 years in prison for fraud, forgery, “arousing national, racial, local, or religious hostility,” and extremism. Since his initial sentence, we are aware that the Tajik court system has added several years to his sentence, including for reading a poem aloud in a courtroom. In November 2019, your government reduced his sentence by six years as part of a mass amnesty celebrating Tajikistan’s 25th anniversary of independence.

Mr. Yorov’s case has attracted international attention, with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finding his ongoing detention to be “arbitrary” and calling for his immediate release and compensation. The NGO Freedom Now has also expressed concerns about due process violations during his trial. We are alarmed by reports that he developed a fever of 102° Fahrenheit (38° Celsius) and was unable to receive proper medical care in detention. Although Mr. Yorov has since recovered, several fellow detainees are believed to have died from COVID-19 and dozens remain hospitalized. We call for his immediate release.

Second, we call your attention to the case of **Daler Sharipov**, a prominent journalist who has published articles on human rights and religious freedom. On January 28, 2020, Mr. Sharipov was arrested on charges of “inciting religious discord” (Article 189 of the Criminal Code) for printing and distributing a dissertation. On April 16, he received a one-year sentence, a charge Human Rights Watch has called “fabricated” and “baseless.” We call for his immediate release.

We thank you for your consideration of our request and urge swift action on these cases.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Mitt Romney
United States Senator



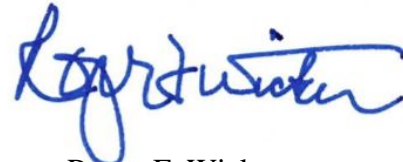
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator