

SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

Minister of Foreign Affairs Sirodjiddin Aslov
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Republic of Tajikistan

Via email to: info@mfa.tj

June 25, 2014

Re: Alexander Sodiqov

Your Excellency:

I write to express grave concern regarding Alexander Sodiqov, a PhD candidate studying conflict resolution at the University of Toronto, who was reportedly arrested and detained last week.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of over 340 universities and colleges in 36 countries dedicated to promoting academic freedom and its constituent freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, association and travel. In cases like that of Mr. Sodiqov, involving alleged infringement of these freedoms, Scholars at Risk intervenes hoping to clarify and resolve matters favorably.

According to media reports, on June 16, 2014, Mr. Sodiqov disappeared in Khorog, Tajikistan while doing fieldwork on conflict resolution and civil society in Central Asia. At the time of his arrest, Mr. Sodiqov was allegedly conducting an interview with civil society activist Alim Sherzamonov, an opposition leader in Tajikistan. The Tajik secret police, the GKNB, initially confirmed that they had detained Mr. Sodiqov on June 16, claiming that he was engaged in espionage on behalf of an unnamed government. Mr. Sodiqov was reportedly able to contact his family by phone on the same day, but could not state who had detained him or where he was being held. Since that time, however, SAR understands that Mr. Sodiqov's family and colleagues have not heard from him; authorities have refused to disclose his location, or to indicate whether he remains in custody. According to reports, Mr. Sodiqov has appeared on local Tajik state television twice since his arrest, each time appearing pale and confused, with his speech apparently edited in a manner designed to discredit the political opposition.

We welcome any additional information that may explain these events or clarify our understandings. Absent this, the facts as described suggest that Mr. Sodiqov was arrested as a result of nonviolent activity and scholarly research, conduct that is expressly protected under international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Tajikistan is party. This raises not only serious concerns for the detainee's well-being, but for the ability of intellectuals generally in Tajikistan to exercise their right to academic freedom.

We therefore respectfully urge you to investigate the situation and to secure his immediate release or, pending his release, to explain publicly the circumstances of Mr. Sodiqov's arrest and

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on-going detention, including any charges against him and the basis for such charges; to ensure that his case proceeds in a manner consistent with Tajikistan's obligations under international law, in particular internationally recognized standards of due process, fair trial, free expression and freedom of association; and to ensure his well being in custody, including disclosure of his current location and access to counsel and family.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Robert Quinn
Executive Director

Cc:

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