



STATEMENT TO UZBEK AUTHORITIES FROM INTERNATIONAL NGOS

OPEN LETTER IN SUPPORT OF NOSIR ZOKIROV, RFE/RL'S UZBEK CORRESPONDENT

Nosir Zokirov, the correspondent for RFE/RL's Uzbek Service in Namangan, has been the victim of escalating harassment by Uzbek authorities ever since the events in Andijon earlier this year.

On 17 May, local police briefly detained Zokirov's adult son, and National Security Service (NSS) officials accused him of inciting protests and organizing unlawful groups in his hometown of Namangan. After Zokirov demanded an official explanation, his son, a member of a local human rights group, was released. Both the home and mobile phones of Zokirov were then cut off; a person at the local cell phone provider told Zokirov that the head of the company had ordered him to shut off Zokirov's mobile phone.

On the night of 17 June, NSS officers took Zokirov to the local police department and interrogated him about a report for RFE/RL that contained a poem criticizing Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Zokirov was released after several hours and allowed to return home. The following week, the police summoned Zokirov several more times for further interrogation. A local Namangan newspaper had previously published a threatening article about Zokirov, charging he had spread disinformation about the Andijon events.

On 6 August, Zokirov called a regional NSS official to complain about harassment suffered by local poet Khaidarali Komilov. The NSS had been pressuring Komilov to renounce an interview conducted by Zokirov in early August during which his poem about the events in Andijon was read. Zokirov, who had been pressured previously, lost his temper during this conversation with the NSS. The call prompted the NSS to file charges against him for violating Article 140 of the Uzbek criminal code, which makes it a criminal offense to insult a member of the security forces.

On 26 August, Zokirov was sentenced to 6 months in jail on charges of insulting a member of Uzbekistan's security service, following a hearing that took place without the presence of defense counsel or the examination of witnesses. Zokirov was taken directly to prison from the courtroom.

On 5 September, Zokirov's family attempted to meet with him but the head of the prison turned them away, despite the fact that they had previously received permission from the Court. His wife would eventually meet with him the next day.

On 15 September, on behalf of RFE/RL, Counsel Alisher Ergashev finally obtained access to the Namangan prison. Prison officials first tried to prevent him from meeting with Zokirov, indicating that Zokirov did not need his services anymore. After hours of arguing, the Court allowed Ergashev to meet Zokirov, but only in the presence of the head of the prison. Ergashev reports that Zokirov is under huge psychological pressure and looks terrified. Zokirov was not able to talk openly under such conditions, but hinted that he had problems with cellmates, who had been sent to his cell few days prior to this meeting.

On 19 September, The Appellate Court in Namangan rejected Zokirov's appeal and left standing a six-month prison sentence for insulting a member of Uzbekistan's security service. The panel of judges took a mere 15 minutes to reach their decision, ignoring protests by Zokirov's defense counsel that the August 26 trial lacked legality on several counts, including the fact that defense witnesses were not heard and that Zokirov had had no legal representation.

We, representatives of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and of international non-governmental organizations, are concerned about the condition of Nosir Zokirov and call upon the Uzbek authorities to ensure his well being and his immediate release. We also ask that he be given free access to his family and the legal representation to which he is entitled.

We thank you for the attention to this case.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, President

Peter Zalmayer
International League for Human
Rights

VITALY PONOMAREV
MEMORIAL Human Rights Center

SERGEY DUVANOV, KAZAKHSTAN
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