

February 14, 2022

Mr. Sirojiddin Muhridin, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Tajikistan  
Sheroz Street, 33  
Dushanbe, 734001

Dear Minister Muhridin,

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) attaches great importance to its relationship with the people of Tajikistan and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In response to Deputy Minister Ashurboyzoda's letter, dated of January 11, 2022, in which the Ministry asked for evidence to substantiate complaints made by members of the U.S. Congress and requested that RFE/RL "provide proof of the existence of persecution and threats against journalists and records about the existence of pressure on them and their relatives," I want to remind you of the details of our concerns, which you and I have discussed previously on multiple occasions over the last several years, including in the presence of President Rahmon.

Your ministry has in its possession complete documentation about five RFE/RL employees who have waited for nearly three years to be accredited as journalists, and as a result are *de facto*, and illegally, blocked from working in their profession. Your ministry is also aware of the cases of seven other recently hired RFE/RL staff whose accreditation applications have been "under review" by your ministry for many months. Tajik government regulations state that accreditation applications are to be processed within one month of being submitted. These regulations have not been followed.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also, since April 2019, selectively issued three-month accreditations to RFE/RL journalists – all other locally-based journalists working for foreign media organizations are issued one-year accreditations. Tajik government regulations state that three-month accreditations are only intended for journalists visiting Tajikistan from abroad, not journalists who are based in the country.

Regarding harassment and threats, I note these recent cases:

- On March 4, 2021, two RFE/RL correspondents were beaten at the Soro Oil gas station. The incident was recorded on video and condemned by many international organizations. Tajik authorities have yet to complete their investigation and have left the accused, who was initially detained, without judgement or punishment.
- On May 5, 2021, in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency hotel in Dushanbe, an employee of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan, without cause, openly threatened two RFE/RL journalists and stripped off their accreditation badges.
- On July 22, 2021, the deputy head of the National Bank tried to expel RFE/RL's team from the press conference. That was documented in a complaint to the Ministry.

Since mid-2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has banned the RFE/RL bureau in Dushanbe from accepting any internships by local journalism students.

RFE/RL has plentiful evidence of the bullying of Radio Ozodi employees and their relatives by Tajik government authorities in recent years; the most recent such incidents occurred even **last week**. Employees of the State Committee for National Security, the Department for Combating Organized Crime of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, and local authorities visited the relatives of our Prague-based employees to extract information about these employees, to criticize their decision to work with RFE/RL, to put pressure on them to return to Tajikistan, and to warn them, through their families in Tajikistan, to stop creating content that exposes the shortcomings of authorities. These authorities threaten our employees and their relatives with various punishments – at least five relatives of RFE/RL employees have been fired by their previous employers and are unable to find new work in the public sector, while others have been forced to leave Tajikistan.

RFE/RL employees and their families are subjected to attacks via social media, the publication of defamatory cartoons, and false reports about them in state-controlled media. Various government agencies have been responsible for carrying out this harassment campaign; RFE/RL has ample evidence but cannot go into detail or disclose the names of those involved for understandable security reasons.

I call on Tajik authorities to reconsider their current approach toward the work of RFE/RL and our representative office in Tajikistan. RFE/RL is committed to working for the benefit of the Tajik people and fulfilling its mission to provide independent journalism that promotes democratic values and human rights. If the current situation continues, RFE/RL will be forced to reconsider the presence of our representative office on the territory of Tajikistan.

I stand willing to discuss these issues with you and other Tajik officials in the near future in Europe or Tajikistan.

Sincerely,



Jamie Fly  
President and CEO  
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty