

Original: ENGLISH



United States Mission to the OSCE

Concern About Decreasing Space for Members of Political Opposition Groups in Tajikistan

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 8, 2015

The United States joins the EU and others in expressing its concern over the future of political pluralism in Tajikistan. On September 29, a decision by the Supreme Court of Tajikistan banned the Islamic Renewal Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), following months of increased government pressure against the opposition IRPT and its members.

Since the IRPT lost both of its parliamentary seats through flawed elections last March, authorities prevented the IRPT from organizing events, ordered the closure of IRPT headquarters, and issued notice for the party to cease all operations by September 5, citing unmet legal requirements for national parties. In addition to banning the IRPT, the Supreme Court also declared it an extremist organization. International observers believe these actions are politically motivated and intended to eliminate the IRPT—Tajikistan's last remaining opposition group—and intimidate its supporters.

The United States is also concerned about the recent arrests of at least 13 IRPT members, including one who had planned to participate in the OSCE's recent Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. The group's defense lawyer, Buzurgmekhr Yorov, is now also in detention on fraud charges. We urge the government to resolve these cases in a prompt, fair, and transparent manner. We note that the Tajik government continues to assert a link between IRPT members and the violent attacks of September 4. At this time, we have seen no credible evidence that the IRPT as an organization was involved with the attacks in Dushanbe and surrounding towns; the IRPT denied involvement in the attacks.

Tajikistan, like other countries, faces threats from violent extremist forces. Countering violent extremism and combatting terrorism are no small tasks. However, that it is vitally important to distinguish between peaceful political opposition voices and violent extremist acts.

Multiple political parties and choices are an important part of a stable and healthy society. Blanket persecution of all opposition voices could accelerate the growth of violent extremism, as excluded and disenfranchised citizens may seek other, often more negative ways to express themselves and their views.

We, therefore, again urge the Tajik government to fully implement its OSCE commitments and international obligations on freedom of expression, association, and assembly enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including the expression of opposing political views.

Thank you, Madam Chair.