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### **Tajikistan: Abdulmajid Rizoev facing trial on accusations of extremist activity on the internet**

Human rights defender **Abdulmajid Rizoev** is currently facing trial on accusations of “public calls for performance of an extremist activity made using the mass media or the Internet” in relation to his work providing legal defense for residents in Dushanbe who have been evicted from their homes due to a new construction project taking place in the city. If convicted, the human rights defender could face up to 5 years’ imprisonment. Abdulmajid Rizoev is currently being held at the detention centre #1 in Dushanbe.

[Abdulmajid Rizoev](#) is a human rights defender and a lawyer, and was formerly a member of the Association of Young Lawyers “Amparo”, which was forcibly dissolved in 2012. As part of his human rights work, Abdulmajid Rizoev has been monitoring human rights violations occurring within the Tajikistan military during conscription and military service, and providing legal consultation to conscripts and soldiers, including those who have been subjected to physical and psychological abuse as new recruits in the army. In recent years, he has also been actively involved in defending the rights of residents in Dushanbe whose homes are to be demolished due to new construction projects underway. The defender provides the residents with legal representation, lodges complaints on their behalf and informs them of their rights to compensation and resettlement.

On 8 February 2021, the first hearing in the trial against Abdulmajid Rizoev took place before the Shokhmansur District Court. The human rights defender has been accused of “public calls for performance of an extremist activity made using the mass media or the Internet” under Part 2, Article 307.1 of the Criminal Code of Tajikistan. During the trial, the prosecution has alleged that some of the human rights defender’s posts and reposts on Facebook amount to “extremist” activity. Two posts have been cited in particular, two of which were made in March 2020. In one, Abdulmajid Rizoev claimed that of the people he interviewed following the parliamentary elections, 25% took part in the elections and 75% did not, and in the other post, the defender mocked a plaque outside a polling station, which stated that “participation in the elections is a sign of political intelligence”. Reference was also made to another post and repost from April 2019, in which the defender claimed that the Tajik people are unduly placed in conditions of obligations to the authorities, and an old poem in which a father says that his son became a man and achieved everything, but did not achieve humanity. The poem is regularly aired on local TV stations.

On 18 November 2020, Abdulmajid Rizoev was detained at his office in Dushanbe and was then transferred to a temporary detention facility. His whereabouts were not known until the following morning, when the residents he had been assisting at the time of his arrest contacted Abdulmajid Rizoev’s wife and informed her that he had been detained the previous day. Prior to his arrest, he had been working as a legal representative for the residents of a house in the center of Dushanbe, who had been evicted by the construction company carrying out the demolition works. Some of the residents were still living in the apartments when the construction company, which is associated with the authorities, began the demolition.

Before his arrest, Abdulmajid Rizoev wrote an appeal to the mayor of Dushanbe, who is also the Chairman of the Parliament of National Assembly of Tajikistan and the son of the president of the country. In his appeal, the human rights defender alleged that the construction company’s activities were not in compliance with the relevant law regarding the requirements for the demolition of a residential building, the procedure for compensating residents, and alleged that the construction

company was engaged in corruption. Abdulmajid Rizojev also filed complaints to the Committee for Architecture and Construction, the Prosecutor's Office of the Shokhmansur District and to the Court of the Shokhmansur District.

Abdulmajid Rizojev has reportedly received numerous threats from individuals associated with the construction company and the prosecutors for the case. During the trial, the human rights defender told the court that he had been offered \$25,000 USD in an envelope by a director and lawyer of the construction company so that he would cease "interfering" with their business. When the defender refused, he was reportedly told that half of the money in the envelope would be given to the "right people" and they would put him in jail.

Previously, Abdulmajid Ruziev was forcibly sent to serve military service, following his filing of a complaint to the Military Prosecutor's office on the forcible detention and conscription of young men, which he had captured on video. After completing 12 months of military service, the defender returned to his human rights work and worked as a lawyer, providing legal representation in cases of alleged human rights violations.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the accusations against Abdulmajid Rizojev and believes that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders considers the accusations against Abdulmajid Rizojev a clear misuse of anti-extremist legislation aimed at the prosecution and deterrence of human rights defenders' work in Tajikistan.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tajikistan to:**

1. Take all necessary measures to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulmajid Rizojev and guarantee his physical and psychological security;
2. Immediately stop the judicial prosecution of Abdulmajid Rizojev and the harassment against him, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the detention of Abdulmajid Rizojev, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Cease and strongly condemn the practise of labelling human rights defenders and lawyers extremists for their human rights work;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Tajikistan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.