

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED

To: United Nations, OSCE, European Union, SCO
International Aid Agencies
Embassies, Human Rights Organisations

From: Pamiri diaspora civil society activists of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), Tajikistan

Date: 7 February 2022

RE: Call to the international community for an URGENT action to prevent another special military operation in GBAO, Tajikistan

Today, nearly four weeks after our first letter to the international community requesting actions to prevent a new phase of the conflict and protect civil population in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (**GBAO**), we have to acknowledge that our plea remains unanswered. We are saddened by a **near zero** attention to the crisis that the population of GBAO is facing, but we continue to call on the international community to show us support and solidarity in the circumstances when our rights and freedoms are being attacked and taken away from us.

The investigation of circumstances of the killing on 25 November 2021 by the special forces of Gulbiddin Ziyobekov, 29-year old resident of Tavdem village, Roshtqala district, GBAO¹, that led to four days of mass protests in Khorog, is still continuing with no end in sight. Similarly, the investigation into the circumstances of the use of firearms by government forces on the first day of the protest, when they opened fire at the protesters, killing two local residents, Gulnazar Murodbekov and Tutisho Amirshoev, and wounding 13 others, is also being dragged.

None of the demands of the protesters, namely (1) to investigate the killing of Mr. Ziyobekov, as well as the use of firearms by the government forces against civilians during the protests of 25-26 November 2021, (2) to reduce the number of military and security personnel by 60-70 percent, (3) to remove security checkpoints that were set up in 2018 in and around Khorog, (4) to remove the Governor of GBAO, who was appointed on 5 November 2021, and (5) to restore the internet connection, which was shut down on 25 November 2021², made as conditions to stopping the protest on 29 November 2021, were fulfilled, although they were explicitly agreed to by the authorities³. The authorities also broke their promise not to persecute the participants of the protests, as criminal cases against several participants of the protest, charged with cutting trees to block the main road, were swiftly investigated, with verdicts ranging from 1 to 4 years of imprisonment passed within days.⁴

The Tajik authorities continue their pressure of the prominent and outspoken representatives of Pamiri diaspora. First, they arrested Chorshanbe Choshanbiev, a popular Pamiri mixed martial

¹ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20211125/protest-rally-held-in-khorog-following-killing-of-resident-of-roshqala-district-by-law-enforcement-officers>

² <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-protests-third-day/31582458.html>; <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-testy-demonstrations-in-the-pamirs-drag-into-third-day>

³ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20211129/protest-rally-in-khorog-ends-what-did-the-authorities-and-the-protesters-agree-on>; <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-protests-gorno-badakhshan/31583857.html>

⁴ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20220119/group-44-stops-cooperating-with-investigative-commission-in-gbao>

arts fighter, charging him with inciting ethnic hatred and insurrection in a case that involved a speedy deportation from Moscow, the Russian Federation, where Mr. Chorshanbiev lived for the past several years.⁵ Then they organised an arrest and extradition of Amriddin Alovatshoev, a former sportsman and a prominent leader of Tajik and Pamiri diaspora, who was seen at a large rally held by the diaspora representatives at the Tajikistan Embassy in Moscow on 25 November 2022⁶. Mr. Alovatshoev was first reported as apprehended by the Russian police on 11 January 2022 with the purpose of sending him to Tajikistan.⁷ For several weeks the Tajik authorities kept ignoring their knowledge of and involvement with the fate of Mr. Alovatshoev, until finally acknowledging his extradition and bringing of the criminal charges on 2 February 2022⁸. Although the accounts on how Mr. Alovatshoev appeared on the territory, presented by the Prosecutor General and the Minister of Interior of Tajikistan differed quite dramatically.⁹

Government officials continue their accusatory rhetoric increasing the sense of a looming crackdown among local residents of GBAO.¹⁰ The government TV channels and information agencies are continuing their smearing campaign, which started with a TV program, shown less than 2 weeks after the events of 25 November 2021 on the local TV channel in GBAO, which criminalised Mr. Ziyobekov despite the fact that the joint investigation was still ongoing. Local residents, civil servants, doctors, teachers, whose salaries are paid by the government, are being forced to give interviews, where they read out texts prepared by local government and State Committee for National Security (GKNB), calling the leaders of the protestors as criminals¹¹. Due to the specificity of living within indigenous community, these forced interviews against community members cause a serious social clash within leading to attempts of suicide, domestic violence, family separations, long lasting hatred among extended family members. The smearing campaign culminated in a televised statement by the head of the educational department of GBAO, accusing Mahmadoqir Mahmadoqirov, the most influential local leader, of assaulting him in his office. Mr. Mahmadoqirov denied allegations¹², but the authorities were quick to institute a criminal case and bring charges.¹³ Now, the representatives of law enforcement agencies, led by the regional prosecutor, are issuing ultimatums demanding that Mr. Mahmadoqirov appear for questioning, which we believe will inevitably lead to his arrest. We view the actions against Mahmadoqir Mahmadoqirov, Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev, Amriddin Alovatshoev as well as other prominent representatives of the Pamiri diaspora, together with the earlier observed actions of reinforcement of security checkpoints, increase in the number of special forces of GKNB and Interior Ministry, arrival of specialized equipment, supplies of medicines and blood for transfusion, as clear signs that the authorities are preparing yet another special military operation, similar to that attempted in July 2012¹⁴, **in order to eliminate the last dissenting voices and forces and establish full repressive control over the region.**¹⁵

⁵ <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-mma-fighters-pro-pamiri-remarks-land-him-behind-bars>

⁶ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20211126/hundreds-of-people-gather-to-a-protest-at-the-tajikistan-embassy-in-moscow>

⁷ <https://www.rferl.org/a/31676190.html>

⁸ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/laworder/20220202/tajik-authorities-confirm-detention-and-extradition-of-alovatshoyev-to-tajikistan>

⁹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-migrant--leader-alovatshoev-extradited/31682825.html>

¹⁰ <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-isolated-pamiris-fear-looming-security-crackdown>

¹¹ <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/31664696.html>

¹² <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20220201/gbao-top-education-official-says-boqir-beat-him-while-boqir-denies-this>

¹³ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/laworder/20220203/criminal-proceedings-instituted-against-mamadboqir-mamadboqirov>

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18965366>

¹⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/31687046.html>

As reported earlier, the entire area of GBAO, which comprises 45% of the entire territory of Tajikistan with a population of approximately 230,000 people, is in communication blockade with access to internet available to only state institutions and local banks. A call by a coalition of NGOs asking the Government of Tajikistan to fully restore internet in GBAO¹⁶, fell on the deaf ears.¹⁷ There are no representatives of the Western media or international community on the ground, which increases the risk that any actions by the military and the security forces will be left unrecorded and unaccounted for.

We reiterate that all protests and civil disobedience actions were the results of the unlawful actions by the law enforcement against the local population in GBAO, as well as representatives of the Pamiri diaspora in Dushanbe and Russian Federation. **We do not ask for anything but the truth and justice.**¹⁸

In these circumstances, we, the Pamiri diaspora civil society activists, speaking on behalf of the residents of GBAO, as well as all progressively thinking **people of Tajikistan, ask for involvement and intervention by the international community.** We are asking for the statements by the United Nations, OSCE, European Union, SCO, human rights organisations, other international organisations, the governments of the donor countries to call on the Government of Tajikistan, with the view of achieving:

- full withdrawal of military and security forces, except those police and border guard units which are normally required for the maintenance of public order and border protection in GBAO;
- full restoration of internet communication;
- immediate access for representatives of local and international mass media to the region;
- **guarantees from the Government of Tajikistan that no military actions are planned for, or will be taken in, GBAO.**

We are also requesting monitoring, advocacy and assistance by the specialized agencies of the United Nations, OSCE, ICRC, international and local human rights organisations in the course of the investigation by the law enforcement bodies into the acts, which took place on 25-28 November 2021 and caused the protests, with the view of ensuring that such **investigation and trial**, if any, are carried out in **full compliance with the laws of Tajikistan, as well as Tajikistan's obligations under the UN human rights conventions and the OSCE Human Dimension commitments.**

We call on the international community for immediate action to prevent the special operation GBAO and protect its civil population.

END NOTE

Detailed, updated situational report on GBAO is available at <https://wechange.de/project/roof-top-info/file/background-information-on-the-situation-in-kh/download/Background-information-on-the-situation-in-Khorugh.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.iphronline.org/reestablish-internet-connection-in-gbao.html>

¹⁷ <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/society/20220131/by-shutting-down-the-internet-we-are-fighting-information-terrorism-says-tajik-official>

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/feb/04/we-want-the-truth-families-of-ethnic-pamiris-killed-in-tajikistan-call-for-justice-as-tensions-rise>