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### Russia: Human rights defender Bakhrom Khamroev sentenced to fourteen years in prison

On 23 May 2023, the Second Western District Military Court of Moscow sentenced human rights defender and lawyer **Bakhrom Khamroev** to fourteen years in prison. The Court charged him with "justification of terrorism on the Internet" and "participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation." The human rights defender will appeal this decision.

[Bakhrom Khamroev](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer working on migrant rights issues and freedom of religious belief. He is the head of Yordam, a human rights organisation that works to protect the rights of migrant workers from Central Asia in Russia. He used to collaborate with the Human Rights Centre "Memorial", a Moscow-based human rights organisation that was shut down by the Russian authorities in December 2021. The human rights defender also assists Uzbekistani political refugees who are persecuted by the authorities of both Uzbekistan and Russia due to their human rights work and civic and political activism, as well as on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

On 23 May 2023, the Second Western District Military Court of Moscow sentenced Bakhrom Khamroev to fourteen years in prison. The Court also ruled that the human rights defender will be barred from administering websites for four years. The Court charged him with "justification of terrorism on the Internet," and "participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation," both criminal offences envisioned by Part 2 of Articles 205.2 and 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation respectively. Bakhrom Khamroev is scheduled to spend eleven years in a high-security penal colony and three years in prison. The human rights defender will appeal this decision.

Bakhrom Khamroev spent more than a year in pre-trial detention. On 24 February 2022, the Federal Security Service raided his apartment and seized his laptops and phones. The authorities forced the human rights defender's wife, Zukhra, to leave the apartment and temporarily detained her in a police vehicle. During the raid, the Federal Security Service pushed the human rights defender to the floor and did not allow him to contact his lawyer. The authorities subjected him and his wife to intimidation and threats. In the immediate aftermath of the raid, propaganda media outlet Ren TV subjected Bakhrom Khamroev to defamation, portraying the human rights defender as a "terrorist" conducting his activities under the control of the Ukrainian special services. On 25 February 2022, Meschanskiy District Court sanctioned Bakhrom Khamroev's arrest. On 4 March 2022, within the framework of the criminal prosecution against Bakhrom Khamroev, the Federal Security Service raided the offices of the Human Rights Centre "Memorial" and the human rights organisation "Civic Assistance". Given that Bakhrom Khamroev was not a member of "Civic Assistance", his attorney believes that the search was meant to intimidate the human rights community in Russia.

The investigation concluded that Bakhrom Khamroev "promoted terrorism" on Facebook, and posted materials allegedly related to the activities of the Islamic party Hizb-ut Tahrir which has been designated as a terrorist group in Russia since 2003, but which operates legally in other states. However, the six posts cited had no link to the promotion of terrorism, as they covered religious holidays and included reposts with general information on Hizb-ut Tahrir.

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In October 2022, the prosecutor further aggravated the charges against Bakhrom Khamroev with "organising the activities of a terrorist organization." The prosecution concluded that the human rights defender "organised the activities of a terrorist organisation" through his reporting on the persecution of religious groups as a part of Russia's security and counter-terrorist policies, as well as his complaints and petitions to both domestic and international courts. This included complaints and amici curiae submitted to the European Court of Human Rights. The closing indictment also contained a reference to an expert review, commissioned by the investigating authorities, that falsely equated Bakhrom Khamroev's public address at the Islamic Conference in Moscow in 2011 with his alleged leadership position within the Hizb-ut Tahrir. During the trial, the court reclassified the offence from "organising" to "participating in" the activities of a "terrorist organisation".

Human rights organisations have documented the systematic use of anti-terrorist legislation by Russian authorities to target human rights defenders. Moreover, human rights defenders are [frequently criminalised](#) on account of their alleged association with Hizb-ut Tahrir. Even though Hizb-ut Tahrir is a religious organisation which does not practice violence, its followers are accused of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation. These criminal cases disproportionately target Crimean Tatar human rights defenders, such as [Server Mustafayev](#), for their work. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly acknowledged Russia's human rights violations in relation to the members of Hizb-ut Tahrir. According to Human Rights Centre "Memorial", more than 330 people have been persecuted in Russia on the grounds of being associated with Hizb-ut Tahrir.

Front Line Defenders condemns the conviction and sentencing of human rights defender Bakhrom Khamroev as it believes he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work. The organisation expresses its grave concern about the Russian authorities' continued use of anti-terrorist laws to target human rights defenders both in Russia and in Russian-occupied territories. The conviction of Bakhrom Khamroev is part of a rapid state-sponsored crackdown on civil society in the Russian Federation. Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the intensified targeting of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists, whose sole aim is to promote human rights and document human rights violations.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Russian Federation to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Bakhrom Khamroev, ensuring his physical and psychological integrity;
2. Drop all of the charges against Bakhrom Khamroev;
3. Cease using anti-terrorist laws to target human rights defenders for their non-violent and legitimate human rights work, both in Russia and in Russian-occupied territories;
4. Cease systemic targeting of human rights defenders based on their alleged membership of the Islamic party Hizb-ut Tahrir, both in Russia and in Russian-occupied territories;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.