

Thursday 19 June, 2014

FULL STATEMENT BY JOHN HEATHERSHAW

On Monday 16 June at approximately 2.30pm my academic colleague Alexander Sodiqov was arrested and detained in Khorog whilst working on the research project 'Rising Powers and Conflict Management in Central Asia'. He has not been heard of since. On Tuesday 17 June, it was reported on state news agency Khovar that he was under investigation for 'espionage'. Later we heard that Presidential Advisor Mr Khairulloev accepted that Alexander is an academic researcher and he would be released. However, yesterday evening a heavily edited video was shown on television in Badakhshon. I remain saddened and shocked by his detention and worried about his condition. I call on the Government of Tajikistan to release information about his arrest.

Our research project on the management and resolution of conflicts in Central Asia is one of several projects funded by the UK academic organization, the Economic and Social Research Council. Since 2013 we have been conducting research in several countries and have not faced any problems. We have case studies in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and have also conducted research in the UK, Russia and China. Alexander was employed by my university (University of Exeter) to work on our Tajikistan case study. For more information about the projects and a list of the other projects see: <http://www.risingpowers.net/projects/conflictmanagement/>

Our research in Tajikistan involved collecting public statements by governments and civil society organizations and conducting interviews with public officials and civil society leaders. Alexander arrived on 8 June to begin research. I returned from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan on 11 June to meet with Alexander and conduct interviews. When Alexander was detained I was in Dushanbe and he was in Khorog. I hoped to speak to officials of the Government of Tajikistan in Dushanbe and had asked the UK Embassy if they may ask for meetings. But I was told by the embassy that this would not be possible. We knew that there had been political problems in Khorog but our research was of a scientific kind so we decided it would be safe for Alexander to begin research there. Alexander travelled to Khorog on Sunday 15 June and I understand that his interview with Alim Sherzamonov on Monday 16 June was the first he conducted.

There have been allegations in the Tajik media that Alexander had met with diplomats, was involved in 'espionage' and was paid by government. It is true that Alexander had previously worked for international organizations and was known by the UK Ambassador. He took part in an informal reception at the UK Ambassador's residence on 11 June. However, he was not paid by or working for the British government.

I have been working in Tajikistan for 11 years on issues of conflict resolution. Tajikistan has successfully resolved conflict and is a country which has many interesting lessons for us about conflict resolution. I have always been glad that Tajikistan is open to research. I am sad that this action has been taken and call upon the government to release Alexander Sodiqov on the basis that of the evidence that he is an academic researcher.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Heathershaw', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr John Heathershaw
Senior Lecturer in International Relations