

## **CPJ: A BBC correspondent detained on extremism charges**

**New York, June 16, 2011—The Committee to Protect Journalists condemns the detention and reported beating in custody of Urinboy Usmonov, a local correspondent for the BBC Central Asia service, and calls for his immediate release.**

Police in the city of Khujand, northern Tajikistan, detained Usmonov on Monday on charges of belonging to the banned Islamic group Hizb-ut-Tahrir, local and international press reported.

According to the Russian news agency Regnum, Tajik Interior Ministry spokesman Makhmadullo Asadulloev told journalists Wednesday that Usmonov joined Hizb-ut-Tahrir in 2009, and distributed extremist materials and leaflets in the Web-based social networks. Usmonov also allegedly agitated local residents through online social networks to join the banned group, Asadulloev said.

In a statement issued Wednesday, the BBC World Service denied the allegations and demanded Usmonov's immediate release: "Usmonov has reported on the judicial trials and activities of the Hizbi Tahrir party in Tajikistan at the request of the BBC, the BBC has no reason to believe these allegations." Usmonov's family said that the journalist appeared to have been beaten up, the statement said. Before his arrest, Usmonov returned home with several police officers who searched his house, the BBC reported.

"These charges against Urinboy Usmonov are nothing but an attempt to censor coverage of sensitive political and religious issues," CPJ Deputy Director Robert Mahoney said. "Authorities must release him immediately.

Fayzino Vakhidova, Usmonov's lawyer, told The Associated Press that authorities had placed the journalist in a high-security prison and denied him access to lawyer for two days.

The British Embassy in Tajikistan also expressed concerns over Usmonov's arrest and maltreatment, and urged Tajik authorities to respect press freedom and their international commitments, according to the BBC.

CPJ is a New York-based, independent, nonprofit organization that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide. For more information, visit [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org).

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