

Thank you for inviting me today because you will hear about the situation with religious freedoms in Republic of Tajikistan that we experienced now which is very similar or in some cases even worse than the Soviet Union era when I lived until its collapse. I draw parallels to the current Tajik authorities who continue this legacy.

Since they come to power in December 1992, the authorities suppressed and fought against any religion or movement that brought people together. Muslims believe that when they see people who are suffering, they should treat them with mercy. When they see evil actions, they should ensure that justice is done. However Tajik authorities aka former communist don't like it and they want to control and influence. I will outline the issues by categorizing them as follows:

Discrediting religious leaders:

The authorities depict religious leaders as bad people, often through setting them up with women and broadcasting it on TV. They associate religious leaders with so-called "extremists and terrorists" and accuse them of collaboration. For instance, M. Davlatmirov was sentenced to five years for leading a funeral ceremony for M. Mahamhadboqirov in GBAO in May 2022.

Portraying religious practitioners as uneducated:

E. Rahmon, for example, stated on TV that women who wear headscarves demonstrate a lack of education.

Stigmatizing religious dress and overall religious practices:

Children are restricted from going to mosques, and men are discouraged from growing beards. Fining people for prayer in homes; closure of masjids and jammatkhoans (prayer houses), seizing their assets such as schools, community centers; closure of Aga Khan development projects, etc.

Interference in religious affairs that undermines religious autonomy:

Dictating religious leaderships, teachings, and internal decision-making processes. There is a State Controlled Committee on Religion that exercises control over religious practices, doctrines, and leadership appointments, limiting religious independence.

Blaming religious individuals for the Tajik-Russian war:

The government wrongly attributes the Tajik-Russian war to the IRPT, although they had no involvement. The pro-independence movement in Tajikistan during the 90s consisted of several political parties and movements, including Pamiris.

Forced assimilation and revocation of legal status:

Government now goes to doors and asks if people are Tajiks or Pamiris, prohibiting the use of Pamiri languages in government buildings. ITREB was closed.

These are just a few examples I wanted to share, and the list could go on. The current government has not learned to be independent but continues the communist tradition of banning religion and persecuting religious individuals, perpetuating a negative image of them as shady and uneducated. By tarnishing their image, authorities weaken their influence and discourage support from their followers.

I would like to clarify that while I am sharing these observations, I consider myself more traditional in my beliefs rather than strictly religious. These insights are based on my observations and the experiences of individuals within my community.

Dear U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, you have a historic opportunity to draw your conclusions based on what I have presented. I am grateful for the chance to share these atrocities happening in this part of the world.

Thank you for your attention.