**CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS’ STATEMENT**

**TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN EMOMALI RAHMON ON THE SITUATION IN GORNO-BADAKHSHAN**

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations are seriously concerned by the deepening crisis in the city of Khorog, where for the third straight day the situation remains unstable.

Early on the morning of July 24, law enforcement and security agencies launched a special operation to identify and arrest those accused of the murder of the Chief of State National Security Committee in Gorno-Badakhshan, Abdullo Nazarov. In spite of the fact that the operation had been planned in advance, local authorities did not inform the civilian population of its intention to use lethal weapons, thereby putting at risk the lives of hundreds of women, children and elderly people.

Since the beginning of the special operation the entire region has been left without any communications with the outside world. They have been blocked by order of the State Committee on National Security. Roads and air routes also remain fully closed, including for humanitarian goods; in some areas, there is no electricity. However, during a press conference on July 26, the head of communication services of the government of Tajikistan, Beg Zukhurov, once again claimed that the reason for the lack of communication in the region is that a cable was damaged during the fighting and that telecommunications will be restored in the next few days.

Access to the "Asia Plus" news portal was blocked on July 23 and remains limited, in connection with the events in Gorno-Badakhshan. Today, following an oral order from the government, access to YouTube was also blocked, after a video was posted depicting local Khorog residents peacefully demonstrating their opposition to the deployment of additional troops to the area.

The region has always attracted a large number of tourists, and currently more than 60 foreign tourists are blocked in the region; their fate also remains unknown.

A major concern is the fate of the young soldiers, conscripts who have been sent to the region without proper training and knowledge on the conduct of military operations in mountainous terrain. According to official data, during the operation some 42 people were killed, including 30 members of illegal armed groups, and 12 soldiers. There are also reports of 20 casualties among the civil population.

Today, despite the announcement of a full ceasefire on July 25, there is still no solid information on the situation in the region, and conflicting rumors may further destabilize the situation in the country.

In this connection, we urge the government to:

1. Immediately announce a full cessation of hostilities in Khorog and its environs;

2. Reactivate the telephone and other forms of communication with the region;

3. Allow the presence of humanitarian missions;

4. Provide operational information on the situation in the region;

5. Allow representatives of civil society and media access to the region to provide assistance and to assess the situation;

6. Ensure full guarantees of human rights during the investigation of the incidents in Khorog in regard of the persons detained during the operation in line with Tajikistan’s international obligations.

Association of young lawyers “Amparo”

Bureau for Human rights and rule of law

Public Foundation “Nota Bene”

IPO “Right and Prosperity"

Human Rights Center

Independent Center for Human Rights Protection

Consumers Union of Tajikistan

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

Albanian Helsinki Committee

Legal Policy Research Center (Kazakhstan)

Promo Lex Association (Moldova)

Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)

Public Foundation "Golos Svobody" (Kyrgyzstan)

Сenter for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (Ukraine)

Human Rights Monitoring Institute in Lithuania

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor (Armenia)

Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Helsinki committee of Armenia

The Belarusian Human Rights House

International Federation of Human Rights (France)

Ukrainian Helsinki HR Union

Crude Accountability (USA)

Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law

Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association

Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan