

## **Independent Media Under Threat in Tajikistan**

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A recent media forum in the Tajik capital Dushanbe heard complaints of mounting pressure on the press and independent journalists.

Media-watchers said last year saw an increase in libel actions brought against journalists under criminal law. Other charges included “inciting ethnic or religious animosity” and even “abetting terrorism”.

Among the media outlets subject to legal action, the Faraj newspaper was forced to stop publishing for three months, as did the Avesta online news agency.

Faraj’s chief editor Khurshed Niozov says 2001 will be make-or-break year for many papers because of the financial strains created by lawsuits.

Zafar Abdullaev, who recently stepped down as head of Avesta, says Tajikistan needs a fund to provide assistance to journalists in trouble. At the moment, he said, the media were under a “total economic blockade”, and journalists would be asking themselves whether it was worth continuing to criticise people in power.

The head of the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Nargiza Zokirova, wants defamation to be removed from the criminal lawbooks, and an end to the special legal provisions protecting government officials from criticism.

Sergei Romanov, head of the Independent Centre for Human Rights, said journalists themselves had a responsibility to get their facts right, avoid emotional outpourings and above all take legal advice when reporting on sensitive issues.

*The audio programme, in Russian and Tajik, went out on national radio stations in Tajikistan, as part of IWPR project work funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

**Location:** [Tajikistan](#)

**Topic:** [Media](#)

**Focus:** [Central Asia Radio](#)

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