



06.04.2020

To
H.E. Emomali Rahmon President of the Republic of Tajikistan

Re: Immediate Support Needed By Tajik Citizens Stranded In Istanbul International Airport

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), a regional women's rights organisation with 248 members in 27 countries in Asia and the Pacific, is deeply concerned over the safety of around 300 Tajik citizens stranded in Istanbul International airport in Turkey. On 20 March 2020, the Tajik citizens were supposed to fly to Tajikistan from Istanbul via Turkish Airline but the flight cancellation announced during their transit period has left hundreds of Tajik citizens stranded in the airport since 15th March. More than half of them are women with families, including elderly and children, waiting back home who depend on them. They are stranded in the Istanbul airport without any support and information on their return back home.

We are alarmed that the Government of Tajikistan has not taken enough effective measures to help the stranded Tajik citizens in the Istanbul Airport. After the cancellation of all scheduled flights to Tajikistan on 20th March 2020, the stranded Tajik women had widely circulated the information of their whereabouts to [Tajik mass media](#) on 21st March 2020 and written to the Office of the President on 26th March 2020 pleading for help to facilitate their safe travel from Istanbul to Tajikistan. However, they haven't received any official response from the Presidential office to date. Tajik citizens then reached out to Mr. Safarov Mizrobiddin Samariddinovich, Consul General of Tajikistan in Istanbul who visited the stranded Tajik citizens on 2nd April 2020. Mr. Safarov in the meeting asked them to wait until further notice and to look out for each other instead of providing or committing to any official help.

Around 300 stranded citizens are now living near the airport premises in Istanbul city without any financial and medical support. Many Tajik women and men who were living in Airport hotels had to evacuate following the airport's closure on 27th March 2020. Due to flight cancellations, they have been forced to live at a high risk of getting infected with COVID-19 as airport premises are considered to be the [most dangerous](#) place for contracting the virus. Now, after evacuation, these stranded Tajik citizens are also at risk as the [number](#) of identified COVID-19 infected in Turkey has increased to 27,069 with a total 574 deaths (data from 06 April 2020).

Around 10 people amongst the stranded Tajik citizens have health conditions requiring constant care and medical treatment and are running out of their medical supplies. Among other difficulties, there is lack of access to basic hygiene needs including sanitary products for women. Most people do not have enough financial means to sustain for a longer time around the airport premises. The increasing fear of getting infected has started to severely impact their mental health as well.



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The Government of Tajikistan is obliged to protect the human rights of their citizens in any territory, even more so in crisis situations like the global pandemic COVID-19 and should take every possible measures to protect their citizens' safety and welfare. Article 16 of the [Constitution of Tajikistan](#) ensures that any citizen of Tajikistan outside the country borders is under the protection of the State; and in Article 24, Tajik citizen's right to free movement including the right to return to their home country is protected as a non-derogable right, which the Government of Tajikistan must protect even in situations of State Emergency. We believe in the time of crisis, the Government of Tajikistan will not abandon its citizens and neglect the responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its people.

APWLD strongly urges the Government of Tajikistan to immediately take the following actions and all possible means to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the stranded Tajik citizens:

- Immediately reach out to the stranded Tajik women and men in Istanbul and share accurate and full information at the earliest on when the Government of Tajikistan can ensure and facilitate their safe passage to Tajikistan and be reunited with their families and loved ones;
- Effectively coordinate and communicate with the Government of Turkey to ensure the stranded Tajik citizens are protected from the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 during their stay in Istanbul and ensure safe departure to Tajikistan at the earliest possible;
- Ensure the Office of the Consulate General of Tajikistan in Istanbul regularly checks on the needs of the stranded Tajik women and men and make necessary arrangements to provide them with medical, food, accommodation and/or other required support such as regular communications with their families in Tajikistan;
- Ensure the stranded Tajik citizens are fully informed and assisted to take all precautionary measures upon their return to Tajikistan with respect to their human rights, including safe and free-of-charge quarantine, access to free testing and medical/health care services.

We look forward to an immediate action from your office. Should your office have any inquiries, please contact apwld@apwld.org.

Sincerely,

Misun Woo
Regional Coordinator
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)



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