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PRESS RELEASE

Prison guards to be trained how to treat persons sentenced to life imprisonment

DUSHANBE – Prison guards in Tajikistan will learn how to appropriately treat life sentenced prisoners in a training workshop drawing on international best practice.

The training, to be held on 16-17 September, will aim to increase the knowledge of prison staff about international standards related to persons sentenced to the death penalty or life/long-term imprisonment. International experts from the UK and Ukraine and employees of the Prison Service (GUIN) of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan will take part in the event.

*'Unfortunately, there is currently no special training for prison officials on how to treat persons sentenced to life or long-term imprisonment', said **Saule Mektepbayeva**, Regional Director of Penal Reform International in Central Asia. 'Working with this group of prisoners requires particular skills, especially knowledge of international human rights standards. Taking into account the remoteness of the prison, the segregated detention of prisoners and the nature of the offences committed by these prisoners, continuous training of prison guards is the only thing that can guarantee respect for prisoners' human rights and the normal functioning of the prison facility.'*

Currently, more than 60 people are serving life sentences in Tajikistan. Life imprisonment can be applied for the most severe crimes, as well as being an alternative to the death penalty. Unfortunately, a person facing a life sentence issued by the court of justice in Tajikistan cannot be released on parole. A Life sentence without any hope of ever being released is in fact a form of capital punishment. The increase in the number of people serving life or long term sentences, impacts the prison system. Parole cannot be used as incentive for prisoners with nothing to lose who make prisons less safe and make the work of prison managers and their coworkers more complicated. This is also one of the primary causes of overcrowding in prisons, which on its own poses serious problems for prison systems around the world.

The training is being carried out as part of Penal Reform International's EU-funded, two-year global project on '**Progressive abolition of the death penalty and the implementation of humane alternative sanctions after a moratorium or abolition**'. The European Union has allocated EUR 161 370 for the implementation of this project in Central Asia.

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The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders. To this end the EU is active in Tajikistan since 1992 and provides approximately EUR 25 million annually in development assistance.