Uzbek media freedom improved, but repression still prevalent: HRW

March 28, 2018

Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uzbekistan-rights/uzbek-media-freedom-improved-but-repression-still-prevalent-hrw-idUSKBN1H42O6>

Uzbekistan has made some progress in improving freedom of the press, but still has a long way to go before journalists can operate freely, Human Rights Watch said on Wednesday.

After coming to power in 2016, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev pledged to put an end to human rights abuses, and his government allowed the New York-based rights group to resume work in the country last year after a seven-year ban.

“Many journalists told Human Rights Watch that freedom of the press had slightly increased under President Mirziyoyev and described a media environment that has entered a period of change,” it said.

“But all pointed to censorship and fear of repression by security services as a major factor in how they conduct their work.”

Among other moves, Mirziyoyev has ordered the release of at least 27 political prisoners, including nine journalists, jailed under his predecessor Islam Karimov who ruled with an iron fist for 27 years.

The government has also relaxed certain restrictions on free expression, HRW said in a report based on interviews with Uzbek reporters, editors and media owners.

But security services detained reporter Bobomurod Abdullayev last year on suspicion of calling for a violent overthrow of the government. Abdullayev said at his trial this month he had been beaten, deprived of sleep and kept in solitary confinement.

The government did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

“If President Mirziyoyev truly aspires to transition from an era of abuses to one where human rights are respected, he should send a clear signal that peaceful criticism of government policies – whether by journalists, rights activists, or religious believers – has a protected place in Uzbekistan,” HRW said.