

Statement

Kazakhstan – Harassment of civil society in connection with peaceful protests of 16 December 2019

The Italian Federation for Human Rights and the Open Dialogue Foundation and strongly condemn massive, gross, arbitrary detentions, arrests and incidents of the exertion of pressure against peaceful protesters, bloggers and human rights defenders in Kazakhstan in the period 5–19 December 2019. Hundreds of citizens of Kazakhstan went to peaceful protests on December 16 in order to commemorate people who died as a result of actions carried out by the government forces in Almaty in 1986 and in Zhanaozen in 2011.

The persecution of civil society activists began a few days before the protests were launched. As of 15 December 2019, 71 such incidents have been recorded in 14 cities of Kazakhstan. Twenty-four people were subjected to administrative arrests for a term of 5 to 15 days, while three were fined. On 16 December 2019, at least 117 people in 13 cities of Kazakhstan were prosecuted for participating in, or suspicion of participating in, a peaceful protest. Ninety-two detentions, 17 arrests for terms of 5 to 15 days, and 10 fines were recorded.

The police detained activists with particular cruelty and the use of unjustifiably brutal physical force.

In Petropavlovsk, [blogger Azamat Baykenov](#) was brutally detained. Police officers used physical force on his pregnant wife. Baykenov's relatives report that he was subjected to psychological pressure at the police station and [a criminal case](#) was initiated against him. In Aktau, police officers beat and detained the activist [Aygul Akberdy and her husband, former political prisoner Ablovas Dzhumayev](#) as they were leaving their house. Similarly, [Nuriyash Abdreymova](#) was beaten and detained near her house in Aktau. Police officers left her five-year-old daughter unattended for more than ten hours. In Astana, police officers beat activist [Anna Shukeyeva](#) during an attempt to detain her. During the attack, Anna was with her eight-month-old daughter. In Almaty, [Dametken Aspandiyarova and Medet Arystanov](#) were detained by force.

On the eve of, and on the day of, peaceful protests of 16 December 2019, human rights activists of the 'Qaharman' civil society association were subjected to pressure; also, obstacles for their human rights activity were created.

- On 10 December 2019, the police arrived at the workplace of human rights activist Aliya Izbassarova and demanded that she go to the police station with them.
- On 12 December 2019, in the Almatinskiy Police Department of Astana, where a circuit court was holding a trial of detained activists, the police attacked the human rights activist [Altyn Bazarbay](#) as she was monitoring the trial. A police officer took her mobile phone by brute force.
- On 12 December 2019, in Almaty, police officers, accompanied by a man in civilian clothes posing as a plumber, tried to get into the apartment of human rights activist [Dana Zhanay](#). On 14 December 2019, employees of the National Security Committee tried to break into her apartment, because of which Zhanay had to jump out of a second-floor window. During the following four days, the human rights activist had to hide from persecution. The NSC officers exerted pressure on her landlord in order to deprive Dana Zhanay of a place to live. As a result, Zhanay was evicted from the rented apartment.

- In the period 15–16 December 2019, in Almaty, police officers kept knocking on the door and had the electricity cut off in the apartment of human rights activist Yekaterina Tskhay. In addition, the human rights activist's phone received calls from unknown numbers.
- On 16 December 2019, in Almaty, human rights activist [Aynur Iskakova](#) was detained as she was leaving her house. She was held at the Almalinskiy Police Station for 12 hours; during that time, her requests for medical assistance were ignored, and psychological pressure was exerted on her.

The Open Dialogue Foundation and the Italian Federation for Human Rights hereby urge the Kazakhstani authorities to immediately cease the persecution of participants in peaceful protests, bloggers and human rights defenders. We appeal to the diplomatic missions of the Member States of the European Union, the United States and Canada to provide public support for the persecuted.

We also call on the international community, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN to monitor Kazakhstan's compliance with its international obligations on freedom of assembly, freedom of opinion, freedom of information, protection from torture and arbitrary detentions. We urge Germany to suspend its recently signed contract with Kazakhstan due to the systematic violation of human rights in Kazakhstan. We insist on the need to remove Kazakhstan from the partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union due to continuous violations of its human rights obligations under the treaty.

President of the Open Dialogue Foundation, Lyudmyla Kozlovska
President of the Italian Federation for Human Rights, Antonio Stango