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# CRACKDOWN ON CIVIC FREEDOMS IN CENTRAL ASIA

BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE 2024 WARSAW HUMAN  
DIMENSION CONFERENCE

This paper has been prepared as input for the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, held on 30 September to 11 October 2024 to discuss human rights protection in the OSCE region, in particular Plenary Sessions 3 and 7 on Fundamental Freedoms I and II (freedom of opinion and expression, media freedom, human rights defenders, safety of journalists, and freedom of assembly and association). It was finalised in late September 2024 and is published by the following organisations:

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## Summary

Civic space is becoming increasingly restricted in Central Asia, and civil society representatives are facing unprecedented challenges across the region. This briefing paper highlights alarming trends regarding restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). It is based on ongoing cooperation between International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and its Central Asian partners on monitoring and documenting civic space developments in Central Asia in the framework of the CIVICUS Monitor (<https://monitor.civicus.org/>), an initiative that tracks and rates civic freedoms across the world.

The briefing paper covers the following key issues:

**Excessive and unjustified restrictions on civil society organizations (CSOs):** The recent enactment of a foreign agent-style NGO law in Kyrgyzstan has raised particular alarm. The so-called 'law on foreign representatives' imposes stigmatising registration requirements and intrusive state oversight on foreign-funded NGOs engaged in 'political' activities - a term so broadly defined that it could encompass core CSO operations. Non-compliance may lead to severe consequences, including the suspension or liquidation of NGOs. The law has created widespread anxiety among CSOs, causing some to self-liquidate and others to restrict their activities to avoid repercussions. It also sets a troubling precedent for other Central Asian countries, where CSOs receiving foreign funding already face enhanced government scrutiny and widespread suspicion. The recent move in Kazakhstan to publicly list foreign-funded CSOs has reinforced these concerns.

At the same time, significant obstacles to CSO operations persist in the region. In Tajikistan, several hundred CSOs have been forcibly closed or pressured to shut down since 2022, leading to a sharp decline in the civil society sector. In Uzbekistan, human rights groups continue to struggle to obtain compulsory state registration, while in Turkmenistan, no human rights monitoring or advocacy groups are registered or able to operate openly.

**Pressure on independent media and restrictions on access to information:** The media climate in Kyrgyzstan, once relatively free, has deteriorated significantly due to government raids, arrests of journalists, forced media closure initiatives, and blocking of news sites.

In Kazakhstan, independent media and journalists face regular harassment, and a new media law adopted in summer 2024 raises concerns about increased pressure, particularly on foreign outlets.

Tajikistan's media crackdown has intensified, as authorities heavily interfere with media operations and currently imprison more journalists than in any other country in the region.

Turkmenistan maintains strict censorship, limiting internet access and persecuting those who challenge the official narrative.

In Uzbekistan, despite official rhetoric supporting free speech, independent information platforms, journalists and bloggers are increasingly targeted by retaliatory actions, and draft legislation under consideration risks resulting in new restrictions on media content and operations.

Across the region, authorities use concerns about disinformation, extremism and so-called traditional values as pretexts to stifle critical speech and restrict access to information.

**Restrictions on the freedom of assembly and lack of accountability for serious human rights violations:** In 2022, authorities used harsh measures to suppress mass protests during the 'Bloody January' events in Kazakhstan, in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in Tajikistan, and in the Republic of Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan. Serious human rights violations, including excessive force, torture, and other abuses related to these events, have largely gone unpunished as authorities have failed to adequately investigate these allegations and hold perpetrators accountable.

Meanwhile, the right to peaceful assembly continues to be violated across the region. In Kyrgyzstan, a prolonged court-sanctioned ban on protests remains in place in central Bishkek, while in Kazakhstan, authorities routinely deny permission for peaceful protests and arbitrarily detain and penalise protesters before, during, and after assemblies. In Turkmenistan, authorities suppress spontaneous protests while forcibly mobilising citizens for state-organised events, threatening them with reprisals if they do not participate.

**Persecution of critical voices:** Throughout Central Asia, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and bloggers who criticise government policies, speak out against human rights violations, and advocate for accountability face severe persecution. They are subjected to surveillance, threats, and attacks, and are arrested, prosecuted in trials which do not meet international fair trial standards, and imprisoned in retaliation for exercising their freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. Those prosecuted often face charges initiated under broadly worded Criminal Code provisions used to suppress free speech, such as those related to disseminating 'false' or slanderous information, inciting hatred, or alleged extremism. Others are charged with fabricated offenses like extortion or fraud.

There are significant concerns about individuals serving politically-motivated prison sentences under harsh conditions.

Repression also extends beyond borders, with critical voices abroad increasingly targeted through transnational measures. Additionally, forced psychiatric confinement is sometimes used against outspoken individuals, and intimidation and harassment frequently extend to family members, creating a pervasive climate of fear and silencing dissent in the region.

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The recent decline in civic freedoms in Central Asia, highlighted in this briefing paper, is reflected in the latest CIVICUS Monitor ratings. Civic space is currently classified as 'repressed' in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, with scores of 40 and 27, respectively (on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 is the worst and 100

the best). Meanwhile, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are rated as ‘closed’, scoring 18, 12, and 8, respectively. This means that all Central Asian countries now fall into one of the two worst categories.<sup>1</sup>

The issues summarised here are covered in more detail in the chapters below.

## **Excessive restrictions on the operation of CSOs**

Across Central Asia, CSOs are subjected to excessive and unjustified restrictions on their operations.

Recent developments in **Kyrgyzstan** are of particular concern. In March 2024, Parliament passed a controversial foreign agent-style NGO law, which President Japarov swiftly signed, despite widespread criticism from civil society, international human rights bodies, and representatives of the international community. The so-called law on ‘foreign representatives’ provides for a stigmatising registration regime for NGOs that receive foreign funding and are engaged in ‘political’ activities – a term that is broadly defined as influencing decision-making, policies or public opinion and effectively can be interpreted to encompass core CSO activities. The law also provides for excessive and intrusive state control of NGO activities. NGOs accused of non-compliance may face suspension and eventual liquidation.

As stressed by IPHR and partners, although the law on ‘foreign representatives’ is purportedly aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability of foreign-funded groups, its true intent appears to be stifling scrutiny, discussion, and criticism of those in power.<sup>2</sup> Separate implementing rules, approved by the government in May 2024 further reinforced concerns that the new law will be used as a tool of pressure against ‘inconvenient’ groups.<sup>3</sup> Another government decree from August 2024<sup>4</sup> gave NGOs a two-month time limit for registration as of the decree’s entry into force on 9 September.

Thus, groups that receive foreign funding and conduct activities which can potentially be interpreted as ‘political’ now face the difficult decision of whether to register as ‘foreign representatives’ and submit to stigmatising and excessive state control, refuse to do so and risk harsh sanctions, or pre-emptively close down their operations.

As of mid-September 2024, a few organisations had voluntarily registered as ‘foreign representatives’ and been included in the public register created for this purpose.<sup>5</sup> Several other NGOs have initiated self-liquidation procedures to avoid the potential implications of the law, or have limited their public engagement or other activities for fear of being forced to register. At the same time, CSO representatives have also taken legal action to challenge the law, including by requesting the Constitutional Court to declare it unconstitutional.<sup>6</sup>

Another draft NGO law, first initiated in Kyrgyzstan in autumn 2022<sup>7</sup>, remains under review by a government-led working group, with an extended deadline of November 2024. Civil society members of the working group have raised concerns that their recommendations have not been adequately taken into account during the review process and it is feared that the draft law may be re-introduced still featuring highly restrictive provisions governing the registration, operations, and oversight of NGOs.

In addition to having a detrimental impact on the local civil society sector, the restrictive legislation introduced in Kyrgyzstan could also have negative consequences for CSOs in other countries of the region. In particular, the adoption of the so-called ‘foreign representatives’ law set a dangerous precedent that could prompt similar initiatives in other Central Asian countries, where organisations receiving funds from foreign donors are already subjected to enhanced government scrutiny and oversight.

For example, in **Kazakhstan**, CSOs that receive funding from foreign sources for data collection, legal analysis and other core activities are subjected to a separate, discriminatory reporting scheme. Under this scheme, they are required to provide information about their funding for inclusion in a government database. Previously, this information was only accessible to government bodies but in September 2023, the authorities made it public. As highlighted in a joint statement issued by IPHR and other NGOs<sup>8</sup>, this move appeared to serve no other purpose than to discredit those featured on the list, who include well-known human rights groups and defenders. This move also sparked fears that additional measures aimed at stigmatising and intimidating groups receiving funds from foreign donors might follow.<sup>9</sup>

In **Uzbekistan**, CSOs are required to obtain approval from the Ministry of Justice for all foreign grants over 2.800 USD in a procedure that excessively restricts their access to funding, despite some recent amendments to simplify it following consultations with civil society.<sup>10</sup> CSOs also continue to face excessive reporting obligations. At the same time, many independent groups, and particularly those working in the field of human rights, are not able to receive foreign grants at all due to extensive difficulties with obtaining state registration. For example, in February 2024, human rights defender and former political prisoner Agzam Turgunov’s application to register a new NGO called Human Rights House was rejected for the 14th time.<sup>11</sup> Each time, the government has referred to alleged minor technical mistakes in his application. He has also been subjected to intimidation and harassment because of his human rights work.<sup>12</sup>

In **Tajikistan**, requirements to report foreign funding are part of a broader arsenal of tools used by the state to put pressure on CSOs, with NGOs being required to report all foreign grants to the government. According to official information, since 2022, several hundred NGOs have been forcibly shut down or have closed down at their own initiative – a step often believed to have been the result of pressure. In particular, in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), CSO leaders have reportedly been summoned and demanded to close down their organisations under the threat of serious repercussions. At least five CSOs have been closed down by court decree in the region because of unsubstantiated allegations of connections to criminal groups.<sup>13</sup> Both international human rights organisations and representatives of the international community have criticised the extensive dissolution of CSOs as being part of a wider trend of a deteriorating environment for civil society in Tajikistan. For example, Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders stated that this “will have a serious knock-on impact on a whole range of human rights”.<sup>14</sup>

Local CSOs in Tajikistan are also concerned that draft legislation on non-commercial organisations, which remains under consideration, may result in new restrictions on their operations. They fear in particular that a proposed requirement to re-register could result in arbitrary denials of registration for some

NGOs. These concerns are heightened by the lack of transparency of the drafting process, and by the exclusion of CSO representatives from the government working group established to oversee it.

In **Turkmenistan**, existing legislation grants authorities wide powers to oversee the activities and finances of CSOs.<sup>15</sup> CSOs must register projects involving foreign funding with the government and provide regular reports on their implementation and use of funds. The number of CSOs registered in the country remains low, and no truly independent organisations monitoring and reporting on human rights violations are registered or able to work openly, a fact lamented by the UN Human Rights Committee.<sup>16</sup> Because of the high risks of cooperating with exile-based human rights and media groups, most do so clandestinely. Independent journalist **Soltan Achilova**, who cooperates with TIHR, is one of the few who has a public profile.<sup>17</sup> She faces ongoing surveillance and intimidation, and her family members and sources are also subjected to pressure. In November 2023, she was barred from travelling to Geneva,<sup>18</sup> as part of a pattern in which authorities repeatedly have prevented government critics from travelling abroad.<sup>19</sup>

### **Recommendations to the Central Asian authorities:**

- Repeal or significantly amend laws which impose excessive, stigmatising and discriminatory restrictions on CSOs, such as the so-called law on ‘foreign representatives’ in Kyrgyzstan.
- Align legislation and practices regulating CSO activities with international human rights standards and cooperate with CSOs and international bodies to promote a vibrant and independent civil society sector.
- Ensure transparent and fair registration processes for CSOs, safeguard their right to receive funding, and allow them to operate without undue obstruction, interference or fear of reprisals such as forced closures.
- Investigate any acts of intimidation or harassment of CSOs, hold those responsible to account, and ensure a safe environment for civil society to function.

## **Pressure on independent media and restrictions on access to information**

Independent media has recently been subjected to increasing pressure in Central Asia, and access to independent, alternative information is arbitrarily restricted.

The situation has deteriorated markedly in **Kyrgyzstan**, where independent media previously enjoyed a relatively favourable environment compared to other Central Asian countries. In an alarming development, Kyrgyzstani law enforcement authorities raided the offices of 24.kg and Temirov Live in January 2024, detaining journalists.<sup>20</sup> The 24.kg office was sealed for two months due to allegations of war propaganda that were later dropped. However, current and former Temirov Live journalists faced criminal charges related to their reporting and are currently on trial (see more under “persecution of critical voices”). In February 2024, a local court ordered the liquidation of the non-profit organisation behind the Kloop portal in clear retaliation for its critical reporting, which court-commissioned experts



claimed causes mental illness, sexual depravity and drug addiction among the general public.<sup>21</sup> In July 2024, the Supreme Court upheld Kloop's liquidation on appeal, whereby this decision gained legal force. Kloop has, however, vowed to continue its work, using other platforms.<sup>22</sup> While President Japarov claimed that the ruling against Kloop "will not affect" freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan<sup>23</sup>, IPHR and its partners have criticised it as an unacceptable attack on independent reporting and called for its retraction.<sup>24</sup>

It is of further concern that the Kyrgyzstani government has repeatedly used a controversial 2021 law to target independent news sites. This law allows the Ministry of Culture and Information to suspend access to websites for up to two months without court approval if they post allegedly 'false' information.<sup>25</sup> For example, in September 2024, the Ministry threatened to block the *Novye Litsa* site unless it promptly removed an article about alleged Russian involvement in President Japarov's 2021 election campaign.<sup>26</sup> The ministry also warned the local service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Azattyk because of a report covering this story, and Japarov's press secretary suggested that "the question may arise whether we need such a media" if the service's editorial policy is "aimed at deliberately discrediting" the country's leaders.<sup>27</sup> The authorities have previously sought the closure of Radio Azattyk because of its reporting, with a local court ruling in favour of such a petition in spring 2023. However, that ruling was later reversed after the news service reached an agreement with the government.<sup>28</sup>

Another legal initiative, which is currently pending consideration in Parliament, would grant the government new discretionary powers to fine those accused of disseminating insulting, slanderous and 'false' information through media or online channels.<sup>29</sup> Civil society representatives, international experts and the Ombudsperson have all criticised these provisions and called for their revision.<sup>30</sup> Bloggers-activists have also increasingly been prosecuted because of social media posts allegedly containing 'false' information (see more under "persecution of critical voices").

A so-called law on the protection of children from harmful information, which was adopted in summer 2023, prohibits the dissemination of information that "contradicts family values" and "promotes non-traditional sexual relations", which could result in violations of freedom of expression and access to information on issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>31</sup> Further, draft legislation currently under discussion would introduce new, harsher penalties for the possession and dissemination of "extremist" material, as well as calls for "extremist" activity<sup>32</sup>. This has also prompted free speech concerns given the lack of a clear definition of "extremism".

A draft media law submitted to Kyrgyzstan's Parliament in December 2023 was criticised by human rights groups, the media community, and international experts for granting the authorities extensive and disproportionate powers to regulate the media and online space. In response to the criticism, President Japarov ordered a further revision of the draft law by a working group including media representatives.<sup>33</sup> A new version of the draft law presented in June 2024 featured important improvements, although some concerns still remain.<sup>34</sup> The revised draft law will be considered by Parliament following public consultations.

**Kazakhstan's** few independent media operate at risk. A series of physical and cyberattacks on independent outlets and journalists were reported ahead of the 2023 parliamentary elections,<sup>35</sup> with the suspected organiser eventually being freed from criminal responsibility by reason of insanity.<sup>36</sup> Later on,

new attacks have been reported. In a recent disturbing case, an exile-based opposition journalist, who had been charged by Kazakhstani authorities in absentia, died in Kyiv in July 2024 following an assassination attempt. Journalists, bloggers and activists based in Kazakhstan also continue to be detained and prosecuted, increasingly for allegedly disseminating 'false', defamatory and offensive information but also on other charges (see more under "persecution of critical voices").

A new media law, which was signed by President Tokayev in June 2024, has given rise to concerns about increasing pressure on independent media in Kazakhstan. While media watchdogs and international experts have welcomed certain aspects of the new law, they have expressed concerns about vague language and deviations from international standards in other provisions.<sup>37</sup> Notably, the new law mandates compulsory state registration for both offline and online media and grants the government new broad powers to deny accreditation to foreign media outlets and journalists.<sup>38</sup> The introduction of the latter provisions coincided with difficulties faced by over 30 correspondents from RFE/RL's local service in obtaining accreditation. While the service eventually reached an agreement with the Foreign Ministry on the accreditation of its journalists<sup>39</sup>, it is feared that new similar cases might occur.

In follow-up to the new media law, the government introduced new accreditation rules for foreign media and journalists in Kazakhstan. These rules allow the Foreign Ministry to deny or withdraw accreditation for unspecified violations of national law and also – in the case of journalists – to revoke accreditation because of activities deemed inconsistent with "the officially declared purpose" of their work.<sup>40</sup> In addition, other recently introduced rules provide that domestic journalists' accreditation to cover official press briefings may be suspended for six months if they violate the codes of conduct for such events.<sup>41</sup> Media watchdogs have warned that the new accreditation rules could be used to target both foreign and domestic journalists who are critical of the authorities.<sup>42</sup>

Further, there are concerns about initiatives to curtail freedom of expression under the guise of preserving traditional values and protecting children's rights in Kazakhstan. In June 2024, the government announced that a public petition to ban 'LGBT propaganda' had gathered enough signatures for it to be considered by a working group led by the Ministry of Culture and Information.<sup>43</sup> Human rights defenders and international experts severely criticised the initiative, with a group of UN experts stressing that it is "based on prejudice" and 'any legislation arising from it would inevitably and unlawfully trample on human rights' in violation of Kazakhstan's international obligations.<sup>44</sup> Despite this, the Ministry of Culture decided to partially support the petition and ordered the conduct of a study into the alleged influence of LGBT materials on children.<sup>45</sup> Earlier this year, during the discussion of the new media law, MPs already proposed introducing sanctions for propaganda of so-called non-traditional sexual relations<sup>46</sup>, which shows that there is support for such legislation among decision-makers, although the proposal was not approved at that time. In another recent development, the government blocked a website aimed at informing young people about LGBT issues in February 2024, citing the protection of national traditions and children's rights as justification for the move.<sup>47</sup>

**Tajikistan's** media climate has deteriorated even further in recent years due to the closure of independent news outlets and persecution of independent journalists.<sup>48</sup> As highlighted in the 2023 prison census published by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),<sup>49</sup> more journalists were serving prison sentences in Tajikistan than in any other Central Asian country. Over 10 journalists and bloggers

are currently imprisoned after being convicted in unfair trials (see more under “persecution of critical voices”).

At the same time, Tajikistani authorities continue to control and interfere in media outlets’ editorial policies in violation of national law and international standards. For example, in February 2024, government officials reportedly warned the local TV station TRK Asia in Khujand that its license could be revoked unless it stopped producing some of its programmes, which allegedly were contrary to national law and “offended national values”. Independent media also face restrictions on access to information, in particular on issues that are sensitive to the government, such as issues related to the border conflict with Kyrgyzstan.<sup>50</sup>

In a welcome development, civil society representatives were consulted in the process of elaborating a new draft media law, with several of their key recommendations being incorporated in the draft. The draft law is currently being reviewed by relevant government ministries prior to its continued consideration in Parliament. The process of revision is expected to take another two months.

Similarly, there are ongoing concerns about state interference with media operations in **Turkmenistan**. While using national media as platforms for disseminating state-dictated information, authorities continue to prevent access to alternative information.<sup>51</sup> Despite the government’s proclaimed commitment to improving internet access, access remains expensive and slow compared to international standards, with Turkmenistan being ranked last among 161 countries in terms of broadband speed in the Speedtest Global Index for August 2024.<sup>52</sup> In addition, internet access remains heavily censored, and many online resources which have been blocked inside the country are only accessible with the help of so-called virtual private networks (VPNs), used to circumvent censorship. Search statistics show that Turkmenistan was the country with the most searches for VPNs in 2023.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, authorities actively campaign against VPNs, including by blocking access to them and intimidating VPN users.

The Turkmenistani authorities also continue to intimidate and harass journalists, bloggers and others who criticise the government – both in- and outside the country, thereby upholding a climate of fear (see more under “persecution of critical voices”).

Although **Uzbekistan’s** President Mirziyoyev continues to make statements expressing his support for free speech, in reality independent journalists and bloggers operate at increasing risk, with a growing number having been singled out for reprisals, including arrest and prosecution (see more under “persecution of critical voices”). Independent news outlets have also been targeted. For example, several media sites have been shut down under broadly worded legal provisions, which prohibit the online publication of information that is ‘knowingly false’ or ‘demonstrates disrespect’ for the state,<sup>54</sup> while others have reportedly deleted publications following pressure.<sup>55</sup>

Draft legislation risks resulting in new unjustified restrictions on media freedom and free speech in Uzbekistan. For example, OSCE experts have raised concerns that a draft Information Code under consideration provides for vaguely worded grounds for restricting media content, e.g. information deemed to be ‘false’, promote ‘extremism’, or to deny ‘family values’. The experts also criticised overbroad

grounds for suspending or terminating media activities under the law, saying this “is likely to produce a chilling effect on media freedom”.<sup>56</sup>

Further, human rights groups have expressed concern over the vague wording used in a draft law, which was approved by the lower house of Parliament in June 2024 and the upper house on 20 September, and now is awaiting the president's signature. Under this law, authorities may designate foreign citizens ‘undesirable’ and impose five-year entry bans on them because of public speeches, statements or other actions that are considered to undermine state sovereignty, incite hatred or ‘demean the honour, dignity or historical legacy of the people of Uzbekistan’. These provisions could be used to arbitrarily restrict legitimate free speech of foreign journalists and others covering human rights violations, corruption, or other issues which are sensitive to the authorities. In a joint statement, close to 30 NGOs, including IPHR and AHRCA called on the president to veto the law.<sup>57</sup>

### **Recommendations to the Central Asian authorities:**

- Repeal or amend laws and practices that restrict media freedom and free speech in violation of international standards.
- Facilitate the operation of independent media outlets by removing excessive registration and regulatory barriers, and ensure that media and journalists can operate without fear of reprisals.
- Put an end to any government censorship and refrain from arbitrarily limiting access to information online, including by exploiting concerns about disinformation, protection of national culture or children’s rights to suppress discussion and exchange of information on issues of public interest.
- Promptly investigate and prosecute those responsible for attacks, harassment, or intimidation against media and journalists.

## **Violations of the right to peaceful protest**

Across Central Asia, fear of repercussions for public criticism discourages civil society members from participating in peaceful protests. This trend intensified after the regional crises of 2022, when authorities used harsh measures to suppress mass protests against government policies during the ‘Bloody January’ events in **Kazakhstan**, in the **Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in Tajikistan**, and in the **Republic of Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan**.<sup>58</sup>

A serious concern is the continued, widespread lack of accountability for human rights violations perpetrated during the 2022 crises, such as the excessive use of force, torture, and other violations of the rights of protesters. While regional authorities have rejected calls for international investigations into these events, the measures taken by them to investigate violations and bring those responsible to justice have lacked independence, thoroughness, and effectiveness. For example, according to official figures, as of January 2024, 34 law enforcement and security officials had been convicted on charges relating to torture and other violations committed during the “Bloody January” events in Kazakhstan.<sup>59</sup> Since then, several additional convictions have been issued, and the proceedings in other cases are still under way.<sup>60</sup> However, while it is welcome that officials have been arrested, prosecuted and convicted for abuses, the

number of prosecutions and convictions still remains low compared to the scale of the reported violations, with hundreds of complaints about abuse having been filed by protestors detained in January 2022.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the legal proceedings in the cases initiated have been marred by fair trial and due process violations, and the sentences handed down have often not reflected the severity of the crimes.<sup>62</sup> In addition, there are concerns about the lack of adequate compensation to victims of abuse and their families.<sup>63</sup>

There are also ongoing violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the region.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, a court-sanctioned ban on peaceful protests has been in effect in central areas of the capital, Bishkek for over two years. Initially imposed after the Russian embassy requested a halt to protests outside its premises following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the ban has been repeatedly extended.<sup>64</sup>

In **Kazakhstan**, authorities routinely deny permission for peaceful protests, and arbitrarily detain and penalise protesters before, during, and after unauthorised assemblies. For example, authorities have obstructed peaceful assemblies to demand justice for the victims of the January 2022 events, protest Russia's war on Ukraine, highlight women's rights violations, and call for democratic reforms and the release of political prisoners.<sup>65</sup> Most recently, before an October 2024 referendum on government plans to construct a nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan, authorities have attempted to suppress peaceful expressions of protest on this issue, e.g. by preventing activists from attending public debates and fining an activist over a YouTube clip questioning the referendum.<sup>66</sup>

Kazakhstani authorities often interpret the term 'assembly' broadly and target even those who gather for reasons other than to protest, such as to show support for activists on trial. Social media posts about planned protests are also often deemed as violations of the rules for holding assemblies.

While suppressing spontaneous protests over socio-economic issues, authorities in **Turkmenistan** continue to forcibly mobilise public sector employees, students, and other residents for state-organised celebrations under the threat of reprisals. These events, and lengthy rehearsals proceeding them expose participants to health risks due to the intense schedules and harsh weather conditions. For example, participants have been required to wear thick national costumes and endure hours of standing, clapping, and flag-waving under the scorching sun.<sup>67</sup>

### **Recommendations to the Central Asian authorities:**

- Ensure independent, thorough and effective investigations into alleged human rights violations related to the suppression of protests, in particular during the 2022 crises and ensure that those responsible are held accountable through fair trials and receive appropriate penalties.
- Uphold and protect the right to peaceful assembly as guaranteed by international human rights standards, including by refraining from blanket bans or other unjustified restrictions, permitting and facilitating peaceful protests, and ensuring that peaceful protesters are not subjected to arbitrary detention or penalisation.
- Ensure that participation in any public events is voluntary and not coerced.

## Persecution of critical voices

Throughout Central Asia, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and others who criticise government policies, speak out against human rights violations and demand accountability continue to be subjected to persecution. They face surveillance, threats both directly and indirectly through their relatives, online harassment, travel restrictions, detentions, ill-treatment, prosecution, and imprisonment. The use of criminal charges to intimidate and silence critical voices remains a particular concern across the region. Below, we highlight just a few of the cases of individuals subjected to criminal prosecution, which are part of a broader pattern of politically motivated persecution.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, 11 current and former journalists with Temirov Live arrested during raids in January 2024 (see “pressure on media”) were charged with organising and inciting riots due to the group’s investigative reports on high-level corruption.<sup>68</sup> The trial began in June 2024 and entered its final stage in late September 2024, when prosecutors requested six-year prison sentences for all the defendants.<sup>69</sup> Although six journalists were later moved to house arrest and one was released with travel restrictions, four remained in detention as of September 2024, including Temirov Live’s director, **Makhabat Tajibek kyzy**. She reported being beaten by a detention officer in April 2024, but the prosecutor’s office dismissed her claims, accusing her of fabricating the injuries.<sup>70</sup> Temirov Live’s chief editor **Bolot Temirov** and at least one other journalist have reportedly been charged in absentia in the same case. Temirov was previously deported from Kyrgyzstan in 2022 after being prosecuted on a spate of other spurious criminal charges.<sup>71</sup>

In a welcome development, 22 activists, bloggers, and political figures were acquitted on 14 June 2024 in the Kempir-Abad case, where they were charged for peacefully opposing a government-negotiated border deal with Uzbekistan. These defendants, who had spent up to 19 months in pre-trial detention, included prominent women activists **Klara Sooronkulova**, **Rita Karasartova** and others.<sup>72</sup> However, prosecutors appealed the ruling after President Japarov publicly criticised the acquittals, suggesting that he would have imposed ‘some kind of punishment’ if he were the judge.<sup>73</sup> The appeal hearing was pending as of late September 2024.

An increasing number of activists, bloggers, and journalists are facing criminal charges initiated over social media posts critical of the government. These charges often rely on vaguely defined Criminal Code provisions on calling for ‘disobedience’ to authorities or riots, or ‘inciting’ hatred.<sup>74</sup> For instance, writer **Olzhobay Shakir** and blogger **Zarina Torokulova** were each sentenced to five years in prison for allegedly provocative posts, while musician-poet Askat Zhetigen received a three-year sentence for a social media post criticising President Japarov. Similar cases are ongoing, including those against blogger-activist **Aftandil Jorobekov** – who opposed a government initiative to change the country’s flag – and whistleblower **Zhoomart Karabaev** – who disclosed a practice in which the National Academy of Sciences allegedly has provided expert reviews dictated by security services. Human rights activist **Ondurush Toktonasyrov**, who has been vocal about government persecution and Russia’s war against Ukraine, was fined 1000 EUR in June 2024 for posts deemed as inciting hatred. Similarly, in September 2024, retired journalist and former RFE/RL correspondent **Bayan Jumagulova** went on trial on incitement charges initiated because of social media posts.<sup>75</sup>



In **Kazakhstan**, political activists, journalists, and bloggers also frequently face charges under vaguely defined Criminal Code provisions, such as spreading ‘false’ information, inciting discord, or extremism. Trials often involve due process violations.<sup>76</sup> As of September 2024, over two dozen people were imprisoned in the country on charges deemed politically motivated by human rights defenders.<sup>77</sup>

Among them is **Marat Zhylanbaev**, leader of the Alga Kazakhstan! opposition movement, who was sentenced to seven years in prison on extremism-related charges in November 2023, despite evidence showing his activities were peaceful.<sup>78</sup> His appeal was rejected by the Supreme Court.<sup>79</sup> He has reported being subjected to pressure in prison, and was held incommunicado for two months for allegedly violating prison rules.<sup>80</sup> IPHR, KIBHR and other human rights groups have called for his immediate and unconditional release.<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, journalist-activist **Duman Mukhamedkarim** received a seven-year sentence on extremism-related charges in August 2024 after a closed trial. He was accused of supporting the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, an opposition movement that has been banned in the country despite its non-violent agenda. Known for his criticism of the government, Mukhamedkarim had previously been repeatedly penalised for attempting to hold peaceful protests.<sup>82</sup>

Civil society activists **Aigerim Tleuzhan** and **Kalas Nurpeisov** are also imprisoned, serving four- and eight-year sentences, respectively, for their alleged involvement in the seizure of Almaty airport during the January 2022 events. Their convictions relied on dubious witness testimonies, while exculpatory evidence was disregarded. Human rights defenders view their trial as politically motivated and have demanded their release.<sup>83</sup>

Women’s rights activist **Dinara Smailova** faces multiple charges related to her work with victims of domestic and sexual violence. She has been accused of misusing funds donated to her organisation *Ne Molchi* (“Don’t remain silent”) and spreading ‘false’ information. Having fled Kazakhstan in 2021, she was declared internationally wanted in December 2023. Human rights groups and UN experts have condemned the charges against her as retaliatory.<sup>84</sup>

Opposition journalist and activist **Aidos Sadykov** died on 2 July 2024 due to the injuries he sustained during an assassination attempt in Kyiv, Ukraine, two weeks earlier.<sup>85</sup> Sadykov had vocally criticised the Kazakhstani authorities, including on a popular YouTube channel,<sup>86</sup> which he and his journalist wife co-founded after fleeing Kazakhstan in 2014 and seeking refuge in Ukraine. Despite their relocation, the couple continued to face intimidation and harassment and, in autumn 2023, Kazakhstani authorities declared them internationally wanted on charges of ‘inciting discord’.<sup>87</sup> Ukrainian authorities identified two Kazakhstani citizens as the suspected perpetrators of the attack on Sadykov and requested their extradition from Kazakhstan.<sup>88</sup> According to Kazakhstani authorities, one of the suspects was detained after surrendering, while the whereabouts of the other are unknown. It is crucial that Kazakhstani authorities fully cooperate with the investigation and that both the suspected perpetrators and those who orchestrated the attack are held accountable.

In **Tajikistan**, an increasing number of journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders have been imprisoned since 2022, after being convicted in unfair trials of spreading ‘false’ information, justifying

extremism, cooperating with banned organisations and other charges. Several of them have been charged because of their alleged involvement in the unrest in the GBAO in May 2022. UN human rights experts have deplored this crackdown and called for the release of those targeted, including **Daler Imomali**, **Abdulloh Ghurbati**, **Zavqibek Saidamini**, **Abdusattor Pirmukhammadzoda**, **Ulfathonim Mamadshoeva**, **Manuchekhr Kholiqnazarov**, **Faromuz Irgashov** and **Khushom Guliam**.<sup>89</sup> In the final report from her earlier mission to Tajikistan, presented in March 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders concluded that defenders, journalists and bloggers “are working in an environment where they may be arrested at any moment on spurious charges, be summoned for routine questioning or face the closure of their organizations or criminal charges”.<sup>90</sup>

IPHR and partners are greatly concerned about **Manuchehr Kholiknazarov**, Director of the Lawyers’ Association of Pamir (LAP), who was sentenced to 16 years in prison in December 2022 on charges of participating in a banned extremist organisation. This harsh sentence was issued in clear retaliation for his work defending human rights and promoting justice in the GBAO. He is currently serving his sentence in inhumane conditions, suffering from severe back pain.<sup>91</sup>

At the same time, critical voices continue to be targeted. In a recent incident, **Ahmad Ibrohim**, the chief editor of the independent Paik newspaper, was reportedly arrested in August 2024 for allegedly attempting to bribe an official to secure his outlet’s re-registration.<sup>92</sup>

The Tajikistani government also uses transnational repression against critical journalists, bloggers, and opposition members living abroad and seeks their return based on international arrest warrants issued through Interpol. Concerns about transnational repression have intensified following the February 2024 ratification of an agreement between Tajikistan and Russia on international information security, which could be used to justify the detention and extradition of individuals accused of disseminating information deemed harmful to the social, spiritual, moral, or cultural environment of either state.<sup>93</sup>

In their relentless crackdown on dissent, **Turkmenistani** authorities likewise use politically motivated imprisonment as a tool of retaliation. Recently, some victims of this practice have been released after serving unjust sentences. Journalist **Nurgeldy Khulakov** was released in June 2024 after spending four years in prison on fraudulent charges, which were levied against him after he shared a photo of a WHO mission with an exile-based outlet.<sup>94</sup> Dissident **Gulgeldy Annaniyazov** was finally released in April 2024 after enduring 16 years of imprisonment, much of it incommunicado and without family contact.<sup>95</sup> While their releases are a relief, these individuals should never have been imprisoned. Others, such as civil society activist **Murat Dushemov** and human rights activist **Mansur Mingelov**, remain behind bars despite calls for their release from human rights groups and UN human rights experts.<sup>96</sup>

The severe risks faced by activists and journalists in Turkmenistan are further illustrated by the tragic case of **Khudaiberdy Allashov**, a former RFE/RL correspondent who died in August 2024 after years of persecution severely impacted his health.<sup>97</sup> In 2016, Allashov and his mother were charged with the possession of chewing tobacco – an unlawful substance in Turkmenistan, ill-treated and held in detention for two months until finally being released with suspended prison sentences. Following his release, Allashov continued to be subjected to pressure and he and his family members were repeatedly detained, abused, and harassed by law enforcement authorities.<sup>98</sup>



Bloggers and activists abroad are also not safe from the regime's reach. Several were forcibly returned to Turkmenistan from Turkey and Russia in 2023-2024, exposing them to serious risks of torture and politically motivated imprisonment. One recent case involves blogger **Merdan Mukhamedov**, who was deported from Turkey to Turkmenistan in June 2024 after his residence permit extension was denied. His trial was reported to start in Ashgabat in August 2024. According to information from the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation, he has been charged with attempting to seize power and engaging in extremist activities, believed to be retaliation for his engagement in a YouTube channel critical of the government.<sup>99</sup>

In **Uzbekistan**, the case of lawyer and blogger **Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov** remains of serious concern. Tazhimuratov is serving a 16-year prison sentence issued in relation to the 2022 mass protests against proposed constitutional amendments in Karakalpakstan. Depicted as a protest leader, he was convicted of encroaching on the constitutional order, organising riots, and other crimes following legal proceedings that failed to meet international fair trial standards. Despite this, his conviction was upheld on appeal by the Supreme Court. Tazhimuratov's lawyer has raised concerns about humiliating and degrading treatment of his client in prison,<sup>100</sup> and his health has reportedly deteriorated significantly due his work in a prison lime production workshop without protective clothes.<sup>101</sup> UN human rights experts have expressed deep concern over Tazhimuratov's arbitrary detention, as well as the harassment and inhuman treatment he has faced in prison.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to imprisoning individuals in relation to the Karakalpakstan protests inside Uzbekistan, Uzbekistani authorities have also targeted Karakalpak activists living abroad, particularly in Kazakhstan, seeking their return to Uzbekistan on criminal charges initiated in retaliation for their peaceful activism. For example, well-known activist **Akylbek Muratbai** was arrested in Almaty in February 2024 at the request of Uzbekistani authorities and remains in detention pending the consideration of his possible extradition.<sup>103</sup> In mid-September 2024, his application for asylum in Kazakhstan was rejected<sup>104</sup>, further reinforcing concerns that he might be forcibly returned to Uzbekistan.

Moreover, as documented by IPHR and AHRCA,<sup>105</sup> bloggers and social media commentators in Uzbekistan have increasingly faced politically motivated prosecutions for expressing opinions on corruption, human rights violations, and other sensitive topics. Many have been convicted under broadly worded Criminal Code provisions, such as those prohibiting slander, defamation, spreading 'false' information, and 'inciting' hatred—charges often used to silence legitimate free speech. Others have faced fabricated charges of extortion, fraud, or similar offenses.

One victim of this crackdown is **Otabek Sattoriy**, a blogger covering corruption, who was sentenced to six-and-a-half years' imprisonment for defamation and extortion in May 2021. The charges against him were widely regarded as fabricated, and brought in retaliation for his criticism of local officials. Despite appeals, his sentence was upheld by higher courts until February 2024, when his remaining prison term was replaced with corrective labour and the obligation to pay 20 percent of his income to the state, leading to his early release. Sattoriy has refrained from commenting on his case and is no longer blogging.

Others, like blogger **Lemara Mirzaakhmedova**, remain in prison. She was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in October 2023 on defamation and other charges. Using a pseudonym, she frequently criticised local officials in her social media posts. Her son reports that she is in need of adequate medical care.

In some cases, outspoken bloggers have been forcibly confined to psychiatric hospitals. For example, blogger **Shahida Salomova** was confined to a psychiatric hospital in April 2023 after being arrested on defamation charges related to her posts about the president and his relatives. The court's decision relied on questionable forensic psychiatric examinations, and she has reportedly received inappropriate medication. Her lawyer has only been allowed to see her once, with no opportunity for a proper discussion about her case. Additionally, Salomova's family has been allowed only limited contact with her.

### **Recommendations to the Central Asian authorities:**

- Cease all forms of intimidation and harassment against civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and others who criticise the authorities.
- Ensure that any activists, defenders, journalists, or bloggers who have been arrested, prosecuted and/or convicted in retaliation for their peaceful and legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms (including those mentioned in this document) are cleared of charges and immediately and unconditionally released if currently in detention. As long as activists, defenders, journalists, or bloggers remain behind bars, ensure that their treatment fully corresponds to international standards and protect them from abuse.
- Put an end to transnational repression and ensure that relatives of activists, defenders, journalists, and bloggers are not subjected to pressure.

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of the country ratings used by CIVICUS Monitor, see: <https://monitor.civicus.org/about/how-it-works/ratings/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the law, see the following appeals by IPHR and partners: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-civil-society-organisations-call-on-president-to-veto-law-on-foreign-representatives/>, <https://iphronline.org/articles/ngo-appeal-to-the-eu-defend-civil-society-in-kyrgyzstan-against-repressive-draft-law/>

<sup>3</sup> The rules are available at: <https://minjust.gov.kg/ru/news/view/id/3519/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://economist.kg/novosti/2024/09/05/kabmin-kyrgyzstana-utvierdil-poriadok-viedieniia-riiestra-inostrannykh-nko/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://nko.minjust.gov.kg/ru>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, press release issued by Bir Duino Human Rights Movement about its legal actions to challenge the law and its implementing regulations: <https://birduino.kg/pressaru/sudebnyie-razbiratelstva-v-zashhitu-konstituzionnogo-prava-na-svobodu-obedinenij-i-realizacziyu-grazhdanami-prava-uchastvovat-v-upravlenii-delami-obshhestva-i-gosudarstva>

<sup>7</sup> See appeal by IPHR and CIVICUS for more information on this draft law: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-withdraw-draft-law-threatening-ngos/>

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-abolish-the-foreign-funding-register/>

<sup>9</sup> See more in IPHR-KIBHR update from December 2023: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-crackdown-on-the-opposition-fight-against-false-information-and-publication-of-foreign-agent-list/>

<sup>10</sup> See more in ICNL analysis: <https://www.icnl.org/post/analysis/new-regulation-on-receipt-and-reporting-on-foreign-funds-by-nnos>

<sup>11</sup> <https://x.com/KurolovaD/status/1762740715212157290>

<sup>12</sup> See more at: <https://www.iphronline.org/agzam-turgunov.html>

<sup>13</sup> See more in IPHR briefing paper from December 2023: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/fundamental-rights-briefing-for-eu-tajikistan-hr-dialogue-dec-2023.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> See press release issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor on 8 March 2024: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/tajikistan-un-expert-criticises-dissolution-700-ngos>

<sup>15</sup> For more information, see IPHR-TIHR briefing paper from December 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPHR-TIHR-briefing-for-EU-Turkmenistan-Human-Rights-Dialogue-December-2023.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> See concluding observations issued by the Human Rights Committee in April 2023:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en)

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- <sup>17</sup> See, for example, an appeal by her to Turkmenistan's president and his father (ex-president), published in August 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyLcQfj5cTc&t=10s>
- <sup>18</sup> See more on this incident in IPHR-TIHR briefing paper from December 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPHR-TIHR-briefing-for-EU-Turkmenistan-Human-Rights-Dialogue-December-2023.pdf>
- <sup>19</sup> See more about this pattern in joint NGO letter to OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid from March 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/turkmenistan-osce-secretary-general-urged-to-raise-pressing-human-rights-issues-during-visit/>
- <sup>20</sup> See joint statement from January 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-charges-raids-against-independent-media/>
- <sup>21</sup> See more in joint statement from September 2023: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-stop-pressuring-leading-independent-news-portal-withdraw-lawsuit-to-shut-it-down/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/08/29/kloop-media-uzhe-tochno-likvidiruyut-verhovnyj-sud-molchal-ob-etom-bolshe-mesyatsa-no-my-prodolzhaem-rabotat/>
- <sup>23</sup> See Kloop article from 3 September 2024 about comments made by Japarov in interview with state information agency Kabar: <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/09/03/sadyr-zhaporov-likvidatsiya-kloop-media-nikak-ne-povliyaet-na-svobodu-slova-v-kyrgyzstane/>
- <sup>24</sup> Available at: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-overtake-decision-to-liquidate-kloop-media/>
- <sup>25</sup> See more in briefing paper from November 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IPHR-LPF-briefing-paper-for-EU-Kyrgyzstan-HR-Dialogue-2023.pdf>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/leila.saralaeva/posts/pfbid02XoSacn4BsamrZmhaCbLHpnD8zBmQZkEuQnjxhyXKToJDLcVo8GjAwvDxbVtePKl>
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/askat.alagozov/posts/8099897236745113>
- <sup>28</sup> See more in briefing paper from November 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IPHR-LPF-briefing-paper-for-EU-Kyrgyzstan-HR-Dialogue-2023.pdf>
- <sup>29</sup> [https://24.kg/vlast/303091\\_shtrafyi\\_do200\\_tyisyach\\_somov\\_vjogorku\\_kenesh\\_postupil\\_proekt\\_zakona\\_oklevete/](https://24.kg/vlast/303091_shtrafyi_do200_tyisyach_somov_vjogorku_kenesh_postupil_proekt_zakona_oklevete/)
- <sup>30</sup> See opinion issued by the Venice Commission at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2024\)025-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2024)025-e), and statement issued by the Ombudsperson: <https://ombudsman.kg/ru/publications/akyykatchy-prizvala-otozvat-popravki-oshtrafnyh-sankciyah-za-klevetu-i-oskorblenie>
- <sup>31</sup> See more in briefing paper: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IPHR-LPF-briefing-paper-for-EU-Kyrgyzstan-HR-Dialogue-2023.pdf>
- <sup>32</sup> Proposed amendments to article 332 of the Criminal Code, published for public consultation until 2 October 2024, at <http://koomtalkuu.gov.kg/ru/view-mpa/4159>
- <sup>33</sup> See more in the following update from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-civic-space-deteriorates-further-as-foreign-agent-style-ngo-law-is-adopted-and-media-crackdown-widens/>
- <sup>34</sup> The revised draft text (in Russian), presented in June 2024 is available at: <https://knews.kg/2024/06/28/minkultury-kyrgyzstana-vyneslo-na-obsuzhdenie-novuyu-versiyu-zakonoproekta-osmi-tekst/>
- <sup>35</sup> For more information about the attacks, see the following IPHR-KIBHR update from March 2023: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-widespread-impunity-for-bloody-january-violations/>
- <sup>36</sup> See more in Orda article from 1 November 2023: <https://orda.kz/delo-zhurnalystov-arkadija-klebanova-priznali-nevmenjaemym-i-otpravili-na-lechenie-378463/>
- <sup>37</sup> These include, for example, a ban on censorship, shortened deadlines for state bodies to respond to media requests for information, and a statute of limitations for defamation lawsuits relating to journalistic materials. See more in expert analysis conducted at the request of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media, October 2023: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/557946.pdf>
- <sup>38</sup> See more in IPHR-KIBHR update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-flood-coverage-restrictions-womens-rights-rally-ban-and-legal-cases-against-activists/>
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-rferl-agreement-accreditation/32917503.html>
- <sup>40</sup> <https://vlast.kz/novosti/61525-mid-kazahstana-opredelil-sirokij-perecen-pricin-dla-otzyva-akkreditacii-u-inostrannyh-zhurnalystov.html>
- <sup>41</sup> <https://www.azattyq.org/a/33105171.html>
- <sup>42</sup> See statement issued by the Committee to Protect Journalists on 3 September 2024: <https://cpj.org/2024/09/cpj-concerned-by-kazakhstans-restrictive-new-media-accreditation/>
- <sup>43</sup> <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mam/press/news/details/788654?lang=ru>
- <sup>44</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/kazakhstan-reject-rights-violating-petition-say-un-experts>
- <sup>45</sup> <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/33060858.html>
- <sup>46</sup> <https://vlast.kz/novosti/59686-ugolovnuu-otvetstvennost-za-propagandu-lgbt-predlagaut-vesti-deputaty-ot-pravasej-partii.html>
- <sup>47</sup> For more information, see update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-flood-coverage-restrictions-womens-rights-rally-ban-and-legal-cases-against-activists/>
- <sup>48</sup> For more information, see IPHR briefing paper from December 2023: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/fundamental-rights-briefing-for-eu-tajikistan-hr-dialogue-dec-2023.pdf>

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- <sup>49</sup> <https://cpj.org/reports/2024/01/2023-prison-census-jailed-journalist-numbers-near-record-high-israel-imprisonments-spike/>
- <sup>50</sup> More information about these developments can be found in IPHR update from June 2023: <https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-on-the-road-to-total-control/>
- <sup>51</sup> See more in IPHR-TIHR briefing paper from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/iphtr-tihr-briefing-for-eu-tm-hr-dialogue-june-2024.pdf>
- <sup>52</sup> <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index>
- <sup>53</sup> <https://www.techopedia.com/vpn/countries-most-searched-vpns>
- <sup>54</sup> More information about these developments can be found in IPHR-AHRCA report published in July 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/iphtr-ahrca-blogger-report-july-2024.pdf>
- <sup>55</sup> For an example, see report by the Uzbek RFE/REL service from 30 August 2024: <https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/33099333.html>
- <sup>56</sup> See legal analysis prepared by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, May 2024, [https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-05-29%20-%20ODIHR-RFoM%20Joint%20Opinion\\_%20Draft%20Information%20Code\\_%20Uzbekistan.pdf](https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-05-29%20-%20ODIHR-RFoM%20Joint%20Opinion_%20Draft%20Information%20Code_%20Uzbekistan.pdf)
- <sup>57</sup> See joint statement issued in July 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/uzbekistan-international-human-rights-organisations-call-on-president-mirziyoyev-to-veto-undesirable-foreigners-law/>
- <sup>58</sup> For more information about these events, see joint briefing paper from October 2022: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Briefing-paper-on-key-concerns-in-Central-Asia-October-2022.pdf>
- <sup>59</sup> See the following media report for more information about figures provided by the General prosecutor's Office: <https://vlast.kz/novosti/58280-v-sudy-napravleny-dela-po-anvarskim-sobytiyam-v-otnosenii-13-sotrudnikov- knb-i-29-policejskih.html>
- <sup>60</sup> For more information, see IPHR-KIBHR update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-flood-coverage-restrictions-womens-rights-rally-ban-and-legal-cases-against-activists/>
- <sup>61</sup> See more in joint report issued by IPHR, KIBHR, the Coalition against Torture and the OMCT in January 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Kazakhstan-January-Report-ENG.pdf>
- <sup>62</sup> See more in our regular updates on Kazakhstan: [https://iphronline.org/countries/kazakhstan/?mark\[\]=civicus-monitor](https://iphronline.org/countries/kazakhstan/?mark[]=civicus-monitor)
- <sup>63</sup> <https://bureau.kz/goryachee/tri-goda-zhdut/>
- <sup>64</sup> See more in update from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-civic-space-deteriorates-further-as-foreign-agent-style-ngo-law-is-adopted-and-media-crackdown-widens/>
- <sup>65</sup> For examples of violations related to peaceful protests on these and other issues, please refer to the following IPHR-KIBHR briefing papers: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/briefing-paper-for-eu-kazakhstan-hr-dialogue-april-2024.pdf>, <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/IPHR-KIBHR-briefing-paper-for-EU-Kazakhstan-HR-dialogue-2023.pdf>, and regular IPHR-KIBHR updates on civic space issues prepared in cooperation with the CIVICUS Monitor: [https://iphronline.org/countries/kazakhstan/?mark\[\]=civicus-monitor](https://iphronline.org/countries/kazakhstan/?mark[]=civicus-monitor)
- <sup>66</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/nuclear-plant-referendum-kazakhstan-opposition/33115723.html>
- <sup>67</sup> See more in IPHR-TIHR briefing papers from December 2023 and June 2024, respectively: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPHR-TIHR-briefing-for-EU-Turkmenistan-Human-Rights-Dialogue-December-2023.pdf>; <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/iphtr-tihr-briefing-for-eu-tm-hr-dialogue-june-2024.pdf>
- <sup>68</sup> See more in IPHR update from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-civic-space-deteriorates-further-as-foreign-agent-style-ngo-law-is-adopted-and-media-crackdown-widens/>
- <sup>69</sup> <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/09/26/gosobvinenie-zaprosilo-dlya-kazhdogo-figuranta-dela-temirov-live-po-6-let-kolonii/>
- <sup>70</sup> [https://kaktus.media/doc/503512\\_specprokurytra\\_otkazalas\\_vozbyjdat\\_delo\\_po\\_izbieniu\\_mahabat\\_tajibek\\_kyzy.html](https://kaktus.media/doc/503512_specprokurytra_otkazalas_vozbyjdat_delo_po_izbieniu_mahabat_tajibek_kyzy.html)
- <sup>71</sup> <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-corruption-busting-journalist-deported-to-russia/>
- <sup>72</sup> For more information, see joint statements from June 2024, July 2023 and October 2022: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-prosecutors-seek-20-years-for-peaceful-critics/>; <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-ensure-fair-and-transparent-trial-in-the-kempir-abad-case/>; <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-mass-arrests-of-government-critics/>
- <sup>73</sup> <https://kloop.kg/blog/2024/07/12/prokurory-podali-novuyu-apellyatsiyu-po-kempir-abadskomu-delu-i-prosyat-osudit-obvinyaemyh/>
- <sup>74</sup> See more in update from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-civic-space-deteriorates-further-as-foreign-agent-style-ngo-law-is-adopted-and-media-crackdown-widens/>
- <sup>75</sup> <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/33115964.html>
- <sup>76</sup> For more examples, see IPHR-KIBHR submission to the upcoming UPR of Kazakhstan, July 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/joint-kazakhstan-upr-report-july-2024.pdf>
- <sup>77</sup> For a list of these prisoners, see [https://tirek.info/lists/wpbdp\\_category/list01/](https://tirek.info/lists/wpbdp_category/list01/)
- <sup>78</sup> See IPHR-KIBHR statement from 1 December 2023: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-harsh-sentence-for-opposition-party-leader-shows-lack-of-real-political-modernisation/>
- <sup>79</sup> See more in media article from 6 June 2024: [exclusive.kz/verhovnyj-sud-otkazal-v-rassmotrenii-zhaloby-marata-zhylanbaeva/](https://exclusive.kz/verhovnyj-sud-otkazal-v-rassmotrenii-zhaloby-marata-zhylanbaeva/)

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- <sup>80</sup> See more in article published by the Kazakh RFE/RL service on 28 August 2024: <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/33096463.html>
- <sup>81</sup> See IPHR-KIBHR statement: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-harsh-sentence-for-opposition-party-leader-shows-lack-of-real-political-modernisation/>
- <sup>82</sup> For a more detailed case description, see IPHR-KIBHR briefing paper from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/briefing-paper-for-eu-kazakhstan-hr-dialogue-april-2024.pdf>
- <sup>83</sup> For a more detailed case description, see IPHR-KIBHR briefing paper from April 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/briefing-paper-for-eu-kazakhstan-hr-dialogue-april-2024.pdf>
- <sup>84</sup> See joint communication by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other UN experts from 18 March 2024: <https://srdefenders.org/kazakhstan-criminal-charges-against-and-placement-on-an-international-wanted-list-of-whrd-dinara-smailova-joint-communication/>
- <sup>85</sup> See more in Radio Azattyk report from 2 July 2024: <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/33018142.html>
- <sup>86</sup> Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNsmiVP\\_84KPtswCMNgz75A/videos?cbrd=1](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNsmiVP_84KPtswCMNgz75A/videos?cbrd=1)
- <sup>87</sup> See media report from 23 October 2024: <https://orda.kz/avtorov-youtube-kanala-base-objavili-v-rozysk-v-kazahstane-378090/>
- <sup>88</sup> See announcement by the Ukrainian General Prosecutor's Office from 25 June 2024: <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/ofis-generalnogo-prokurora-rozpocinaje-ekstradiiunu-proceduru-shhodo-pidozryuvanix-u-zamaxu-na-vbivstvo-kazaxskogo-zurnalista>
- <sup>89</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/tajikistan-un-experts-deplore-criminal-proceedings-against-human-rights>
- <sup>90</sup> The report is available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/268/46/pdf/g2326846.pdf>
- <sup>91</sup> For more information, see joint appeals on his case by IPHR and partners: <https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-two-year-anniversary-of-the-arrest-of-human-rights-defender-manuchehr-kholiqnazarov-he-should-be-released-immediately/>; <https://iphronline.org/articles/support-manuchehr-kholiqnazarov-human-rights-defender-and-fighter-against-injustice/>; <https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-manuchehr-kholiqnazarov-must-be-immediately-released/>
- <sup>92</sup> RFE/RL report from 19 August 2024: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ahmad-ibrohim-kulob-arrest-sources-bribe/33084148.html>
- <sup>93</sup> See more in IPHR update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-on-the-road-to-total-control/>
- <sup>94</sup> See release by Turkmen News from 10 June 2024: <https://turkmen.news/politzaklyuchennyj-nurgeldy-halykov-vyshel-na-svobodu/>
- <sup>95</sup> <https://www.hronikatm.com/2024/04/gulgeldi-annaniyazov-released/>
- <sup>96</sup> See more in briefing paper from December 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPHR-TIHR-briefing-for-EU-Turkmenistan-Human-Rights-Dialogue-December-2023.pdf>
- <sup>97</sup> RFE/RL report from 25 August 2024: <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-journalists-soltan-achilova-hudaiberdy-allashov-press-freedom/33088982.html>
- <sup>98</sup> For more information, see IPHR-TIHR briefing paper from December 2023: <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IPHR-TIHR-briefing-for-EU-Turkmenistan-Human-Rights-Dialogue-December-2023.pdf>
- <sup>99</sup> <https://www.tmhelsinki.org/article/7274a554-6a8b-47ff-96f7-739ec9a55b17>
- <sup>100</sup> Appeal by his lawyer: <https://x.com/IPHR/status/1732413818847043692>
- <sup>101</sup> Report from Freedom for Eurasia, 4 August 2024: <https://freedomforeurasia.org/karakalpakstan-dauletmurat-tajimuratovs-health-is-deteriorating-day-by-day-in-the-prison/>
- <sup>102</sup> Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, 9 November 2023: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/uzbekistan-must-refrain-persecuting-defenders-minority-rights-un-experts>
- <sup>103</sup> See more on the cases of him and other Karakalpak activists arrested in Kazakhstan in IPHR-KIBHR update from June 2024: <https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-flood-coverage-restrictions-womens-rights-rally-ban-and-legal-cases-against-activists/>
- <sup>104</sup> <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/33121382.html>
- <sup>105</sup> See report on the persecution of bloggers and social media commentators in Uzbekistan, published by IPHR and AHRCA in July 2024: <https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/iphhr-ahrca-blogger-report-july-2024.pdf>