

URGENT ACTION

WOMAN DETAINED FOR READING OPPOSITION WEBSITE

Since 13 March, the police have threatened bloggers, activists and members of the public across Kazakhstan with prosecution for supporting the opposition political party, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, on social media. Akmaral Tobylova, is currently under house arrest, accused of financing an extremist organization charges, merely for browsing the party's website. She is a prisoner of conscience.

On 13 March, the Yesilsky court in the Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, declared the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party to be an extremist organization for "inciting national discord", in accordance with vaguely worded anti-extremism legislation. An official from the Prosecutor General's Office stated that the party "forms a negative image of the existing authorities and provokes protest attitudes", and announced that any support shown for the opposition party, including comments on social media, would be considered a criminal offence, prosecutable under anti-extremism legislation.

Since 13 March, bloggers, activists and members of the public across the country have been summoned and warned by the police that they could be prosecuted for supporting the Democratic Choice party on social media. On 15 March, Almalinsky district court in Almaty sanctioned the house arrest of 27-year-old graphic designer, **Akmaral Tobylova**, who is under investigation for allegedly financing an extremist group. She told the Kazakhstani International Bureau of Human Rights: "I just read the site and looked at the news. There was nothing forbidden there. I was interested in their programme because they promised good pensions and housing." Akmaral Tobylova is a prisoner of conscience, detained for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression. According to the Kazakhstani International Bureau of Human Rights, two other people, who wish to remain anonymous, have also been detained as part of a crackdown against those who appear to show support for the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party.

Please write immediately in Kazakh, Russian, or your own language to the authorities:

- Urging them to immediately and unconditionally release Akmaral Tobylova and any others detained simply for peacefully exercising their human rights;
- Calling on them to terminate the criminal proceedings against her and any others who have been accused under anti-extremism legislation for the peaceful exercise of their human rights;
- Urging them to amend overly-broad provisions in anti-extremism legislation to ensure it cannot be misused to target political opponents and stifle dissent, and reminding them that they have an obligation to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression and association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 JUNE 2018 TO:

Prosecutor General

Kairat Kozhamzharov
14 Orynbor Street
Astana, 010000
Republic of Kazakhstan
Fax: +7 7172 506 402

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Human Rights Ombudsman

Askar Shakirov
Dom Ministerstv, 15 podezd
Astana, Levy Bereg
Republic of Kazakhstan
Fax: +7 7172 740548

Email: ombudsman-kz@mail.ru

Salutation: Dear Askar Shakirov

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Kairat Abdrakhmanov
ul. D. Kunaeva 31
Astana 010000
Republic of Kazakhstan
Email: mfa@mfa.kz

Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ERLAN IDRISOV, Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 125 Pall Mall SW1Y 5EA, 020 792 51757, london@kazembassy.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party was set up by a group of prominent politicians and businessmen in 2001 and has repeatedly been refused registration. On its web-site the group calls for the abolition of the post of president, and the establishment of a parliamentary republic, amongst other things.

Amnesty International has already documented the severe restrictions on freedom of expression in Kazakhstan and in a briefing published in 2017, *Think before you post: Closing down social media space in Kazakhstan* (AI EU57/5644/2017) the organization documented how the authorities are now working to “close down” social media as a space where people in Kazakhstan can exercise their right to express critical opinions, and where they can seek and receive a wider range of information from different sources. This latest wave of arrests and warnings is a blatant attack on freedom of expression.

One of the founding members of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party, Mukhtar Ablyazov, is a former government minister and chairman of BTA Bank, who fled Kazakhstan when the Kazakhstani authorities took over BTA bank in 2009 and accused him of financial crimes. He currently lives in exile in France and has been the subject of extradition proceedings there.

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