

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED ON BAIL

On 13 April, prisoner of conscience, Akmaral Tobylova was released on bail. She had been under house arrest since 13 March, and is charged with financing an extremist organization merely for browsing an opposition party website.

On 13 April, a court ruled that **Akmaral Tobylova** be released on bail on medical grounds; the graphic designer is in the early stages of pregnancy. The court's decision is believed to be in large part due to work done by the Human Rights Ombudsman who stated his office was working to ensure that Akmaral Tobylova was given access to medical care. Akmaral Tobylova had been held under house arrest since 13 March. She remains charged with financing an extremist organisation, merely for browsing opposition party, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan's, website. She told the Kazakhstan 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."

On 13 March, the Yesilsky court in 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.

Bloggers, activists and members of the public continue to be subjected to police questioning and arrests for expressing support for the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan opposition party. Amnesty International is currently checking information that one woman was detained in a psychiatric hospital for having shown support for the Democratic Choice Party.

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

- Calling on them to halt the criminal proceedings against Akmaral Tobylova and any others who have been charged under anti-extremism legislation simply for the peaceful exercise of their human rights;
- Urging them to amend vaguely-worded provisions in anti-extremism legislation and ensure that they are not misused to target political opponents and stifle dissent;
- Reminding them of their obligation to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression and association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 MAY 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. This is the first update of UA 63/18. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur57/8122/2018/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party was set up by a group of prominent politicians and businesspeople in 2001 and has repeatedly been refused registration. On its website 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 the right to freedom of expression in Kazakhstan and in a report published in 2017, *Think before you post: Closing down social media space in Kazakhstan* ([AI EUR 57/5644/2017](#)), the organization documented how the authorities are now working to “close down” social media as a space where people in Kazakhstan can express critical opinions, and where they can seek and receive a wide range of information from different sources. This latest wave of arrests and warnings is a blatant attack on the right to 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 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.

Further information on UA: 63/18 Index: EUR 57/8236/2018 Issue Date: 18 April 2018