

URGENT ACTION

KAZAKHSTAN: RELEASE OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER: ZHANBOLAT MAMAY

Zhanbolat Mamay, journalist and leader of the unregistered opposition Democratic Party of Kazakhstan was kept in custody as a criminal suspect after already wrongfully spending 15 days in “administrative detention” for peaceful protest. On March 14 a court remanded him in custody for two months during the investigation on charges of insulting a government representative (Criminal Code, Article 378) and spreading false information (Article 274). Amnesty International believes this prosecution is politically motivated and Mamay should be immediately released from detention and the charges dropped.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*President of Kazakhstan
Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
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Dear Mr President,

I am writing to urge you to take such measures as may be necessary for Zhanbolat Mamay to be release from detention immediately and the charges against him dropped.

I am concerned that the March 14 decision to hold Mamay in detention and the criminal case against him constitute politically motivated retribution for his critical speech and his leadership of the unregistered opposition party, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan.

Mamay is currently under investigation on charges of insulting a government representative (Criminal Code, Article 378) and spreading false information (Article 274) related to two separate incidents dating back to 2021. Previously he was already wrongfully sentenced to 15 days of “administrative detention” for organizing an “unsanctioned” meeting and was due to be released on 12 March but was re-arrested.

I urge you to take all necessary steps in your power to ensure that Zhanbolat Mamay is released from detention immediately and to put a stop his unfounded prosecution related to the peaceful exercise of his right to free expression and freedom of assembly.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zhanbolat Mamay is a well-known political activist and journalist in Kazakhstan. He is the former editor in chief of *Tribuna* newspaper (now closed).

In 2019 he founded and became the leader of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (DPK). The opposition party's repeated efforts in 2020 to obtain official registration have been unsuccessful. In February 2020 police arrested three leaders and more than 100 would-be delegates of the founding congress of the party ahead of the 2021 parliamentary elections, thus halting the process of registration. The move was seen as an attempt to sabotage the assembly of delegates, as Kazakhstani law requires the participation of at least 1,000 people in the founding congress of a political party for it to be officially recognised.

On 4 January 2022 in protest against a dramatic rise in fuel prices, thousands of people took to the streets of Kazakhstan. Their economic discontent was quickly followed by broader popular calls against corruption, political stagnation, and widespread injustice. Authorities responded with hostility to the protestors, by targeting and silencing journalists and activists, and by suppressing freedom of expression and the flow of independent information. In an alarming development, as damage to property and the number of casualties grew, troops in the streets were instructed by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to open fire without warning. Additionally, when the protests spread and violence broke out in Almaty and elsewhere, the authorities shut down the Internet and disabled social media and other means of digital communication. The official figures provided by the government of those killed during the protest are 230 people including 19 of whom they said were identified as police or army personnel. The government of Kazakhstan has failed to act on calls from Amnesty International and others for an independent international investigation of the January 2022 events.

Mamay and other members of the DPK joined peaceful protests on 4 and 5 January. On 13 February Mamay organized a peaceful public vigil in Almaty to commemorate those killed in the violence that wracked the country in January. He was arrested on 25 February and sentenced to 15 days of "administrative detention" for organizing or participating in an "unsanctioned" meeting (Code of Administrative Offences, Article 488, part 11). He was due to be released on March 12, but instead is being kept in detention facing criminal charges.

The charges brought against Mamay on March 14 relate to two separate incidents dating back to 2021. The charge of insulting a government representative stems from statements he allegedly made to police on 18 September 2021 when police prevented him from joining a public protest he had organized in opposition to government policy related to the use of citizens' online data. Mamay has denied the charges. An investigation into the incident was opened in December 2021.

The charge of spreading false information is based on a YouTube video Mamay made in October 2021 that sought to explain to people with financial debts how to obtain help from credit companies in rehabilitating their debts. The video sparked an estimated 8,000 applications to credit companies for help using Mamay's instructions. The prosecutor's characterization of the video as false information was contradicted by a report by a judicial expert who found no evidence of any criminal offence; nonetheless the charges have not been dropped.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 May 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Zhanbolat Mamay (he, him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a

ADDITIONAL TARGET

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