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Kyrgyzstan: Release of two detained journalists welcomed, but dismay at continuing detention of female colleague

Amnesty International welcomed the release yesterday of imprisoned journalists Yrysbek Omurzakov and Alexander Alyanchikov, but expressed dismay that Zamira Sadykova, Alyanchikov's codefendant, remains in detention.

"Satisfaction at the freeing of Yrysbek Omurzakov and Alexander Alyanchikov is naturally tempered by our continuing concern for prisoner of conscience Zamira Sadykova, who should also be released immediately," Amnesty International said today.

"Moreover, we object that the releases are not unconditional: Yrysbek Omurzakov is still facing a criminal trial for libel, while Alexander Alyanchikov is banned from journalism for 18 months."

Zamira Sadykova and Alexander Alyanchikov, of the newspaper *Res Publika*, were sentenced on 23 May to 18-month prison terms after a criminal trial for libel. At an appeal hearing on 10 June in the City Court in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, Alexander Alyanchikov's sentence was suspended, although a ban on working as a journalist imposed as part of the original court verdict was left in place. The only change to Zamira Sadykova's sentence, however, was the imposition of a more lenient prison regime.

By a separate ruling of the Bishkek City Court on the same day, fellow *Res Publika* journalist Yrysbek Omurzakov was released on bail while he awaits a retrial on a criminal libel charge. Arrested in March, he had remained in detention after his original trial had been halted on 21 May.

Amnesty International has consistently complained to authorities in Kyrgyzstan about the inappropriate use of criminal libel charges in cases such as those involving these journalists. The organization regards such prosecutions as an attack on the human right to freedom of expression.

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