

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE THE KEMPIR-ABAD DEFENDANTS

A group of individuals have been arrested on charges related to their participation in peaceful protests in Kempir-Abad against a controversial new border agreement with Uzbekistan. A number are under house arrest and others remain in pretrial detention in poor conditions. Some of them have been charged with “attempting to violently overthrow the government”, which carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison.

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

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Dear Mr President,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the arbitrary detention of a group of individuals following peaceful public protests in Kempir-Abad. Some have been charged with the serious offence of "attempting to violently overthrow the government" simply for [organizing and/or participating] in peaceful protests and expressing criticism of the government.

The prosecution has thus far failed to provide any credible evidence against any of the defendants of the serious charges against them. It is apparent that their only "crime" was their peaceful protest and criticism against the government's decision to cede control over the Kempir-Abad water reservoir to Uzbekistan.

Some defendants are being held in inhumane conditions and have not been allowed to access the medical treatment they need for their deteriorating health conditions.

Kyrgyzstan's government has an obligation to respect and facilitate the right to peaceful assembly and ensure that any restriction is necessary and proportionate to a legitimate aim. Criminalizing individuals simply for taking part in peaceful protests is a violation of human rights.

I urge you to:

Do everything within your power to ensure that all charges against the defendants that stem solely from their exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are dropped, and that those that are under any form of detention are immediately released.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

More than 20 peaceful protestors were arrested in October 2022 in connection to a controversy about a land-swap involving the Kempir-Abad reservoir. There are currently 27 individuals in pretrial detention or under house arrest in connection with this case.

The arrests came after a group of politicians and activists formed the "Kempir-Abad Defence Committee" to protest against the lack of consultation over a new border demarcation agreement with Uzbekistan. The agreement would cede control of the Kempir-Abad (Andizhan) fresh-water reservoir to Uzbekistan in exchange for agricultural land.

The authorities arrested multiple members of the committee and others connected to them in October 2022 and during subsequent weeks. The defendants were transferred to detention centres and some were not allowed access to their lawyers.

Seven defendants are being held in the Bishkek pretrial detention centre (SIZO No.1), who have complained about the inhumane conditions of detention. They do not have access to proper water and sanitation, room for exercise, necessary medical treatment and family visits. These defendants are:

1. Rita Karasartova, a human rights activist and head of the non-governmental Institute for Public Analysis. She is also a member of the United Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan.
2. Ali Shabdan, an activist who joined the Reform party, led by Klara Sooronkulova.
3. Erlan Bekchoroev, an activist and member of the Turan Democratic Party.
4. Zhenish Moldokmatov, an activist and leader of the Turan Democratic Party.
5. Aidanbek Akmatov, a journalist who worked at the BBC and Azattyk Radio (RFE/RL).
6. Atay Beyshenbek, a blogger and activist.
7. Marat Bayazov, an activist, business consultant, and a member of the United Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan.

Five other defendants have been placed under house arrest, including:

1. Asiya Sasykbayeva, a human rights activist and former Member of Parliament.
2. Klara Sooronkulova, a member of the United Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan.
3. Gulnara Dzhurabaeva, an activist and former Central Electoral Commission member.
4. Perizat Suranova, an activist who managed various international projects, including "Women's Rights to Land" (UNIFEM project) and stood for election as a member of parliament in 2021.
5. Ulugbek Mamatayev, a politician and an activist who stood for election in 2020 and 2021.

The United Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan is an opposition movement formed in March 2022 by a group of activists and human rights defenders, some of whom have been involved in the protests. Among their goals, the movement is working for the restoration of democratic institutions, the creation of a fair justice system, the development of anti-crisis economic measures and the fight against poverty.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Kyrgyz, Russian, English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [17 July 2023]

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:

Rita Karasartova (she/her)

Ali Shabdan (he/him)

Erlan Bekchoroev (he/him)

Zhenish Moldokmatov (he/him)

Aidanbeck Akmatov (he/him)

Atay Beyshenback (he/him)

Marat Bayazov (he/him)

Asiya Sasykbayeva (she/her)

Klara Sooronkulova (she/her)

Gulnara Dzhurabaeva (she/her)

Perizat Suranova (she/her)

Ulugbek Mamatayev (he/him)