

[Joint Statement] Kazakhstan: Protect people's fundamental rights to peaceful protest and dissent

(Bangkok, 10 February 2022) – We, the undersigned organisations, deeply alarmed by the crackdown on peaceful protests organised by the people of Kazakhstan and the violence and human rights violations that ensued thereof, extend our firm solidarity with the Kazakhstani people. The protests, which quickly spilled across the country gathering thousands of civilians, were a culmination of the genuine and pent-up frustration of the public against widening inequality, lack of representation, and overall government apathy. The false and blanket accusation of terrorism¹ against peaceful protestors² in a bid to justify the Presidential decree to “fire without warning” is symptomatic of the larger problem of widespread and systemic human rights violations that mar the country.

We stand by the people of Kazakhstan and strongly condemn the malevolent intention of the authorities to criminalise, persecute, and obliterate dissenting voices³, in a complete disregard to the internationally protected rights of the freedom of expression, assembly, and association. The government is under a direct obligation to protect these fundamental rights by virtue of Kazakhstan's accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2006. The measures taken by the authorities to disrupt the protests – excess and indiscriminate use of police force against peaceful protestors, mass arbitrary detentions, shootings leading to loss of civilian lives, and internet shutdowns⁴ – were neither necessary nor proportionate.

The government also dangerously failed in its responsibility to protect peaceful protestors from acts of violence perpetuated by some miscreants which posed a threat to the protestors. It has been reported that this deterred women from joining the protests⁵, thereby infringing on their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. We reiterate our unwavering solidarity to the protestors and their families who bore the brunt of these unlawful measures launched by the government and commit to supporting the people in their pursuit of political reform, democratization, and equality.

We call on the authorities to refrain from all acts of violence and intimidation against the people, unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained, protect the right to a fair trial of the detainees, and ensure the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association are fully respected by the State apparatus. We urge the government to thoroughly and independently investigate the attacks on civilians who were exercising their inherent right to the freedom of expression, assembly, and association. We also strongly condemn all acts of surveillance against human rights

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59907235>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=28019&LangID=E>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60058972>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59880166> ;
<https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-protests-livestreaming-mother/31681880.html>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/kazakhstan-authorities-raise-death-toll-from-unrest-to-225>

⁵ <https://www.newsweek.com/where-are-women-kazakhstans-protests-opinion-1669566>;
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/kazakhstan-protests-zhanar-sekerbayeva/>

defenders, including through spyware and demand a thorough and transparent investigation to bring those responsible to justice.⁶

This joint statement is endorsed by

- 1 Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- 2 Asian Resource Foundation (ARF)
- 3 Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM)
- 4 Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM)
- 5 Bytes for All
- 6 Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)
- 7 Dalit Foundation
- 8 Globe International Center
- 9 Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
- 10 Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC)
- 11 Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS)
- 12 Law and Society Trust (LST)
- 13 Odhikar
- 14 People's Watch
- 15 Progressive Voice
- 16 Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)
- 17 Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
- 18 Think Centre
- 19 Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/kazakhstan-four-activists-mobile-devices-infected-with-pegasus-spyware/>