

"Building Central Asian Human Rights Protection and Education Through the Media" Project

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

May 2011

Newsletter



FINAL ISSUE



European Commission



Foreign Ministry of Norway

INSTITUTE FOR WAR & PEACE REPORTING



Institute for War and Peace Reporting

WELCOMING MESSAGE FROM IWPR REGIONAL DIRECTOR
IN CENTRAL ASIA ABAKHON SULTONNAZAROV



DEAR READERS,

*"The Truth is found when men (and Women)
are free to pursue it."*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Violations of human rights are as old as time, and many communities consider such violations to be part of their cultural traditions. To be honest, this has made this human rights project almost an endurance test for IWPR's staff in Central Asia. We have never been so deep into human rights issues before. Yes, we have written about human rights, yet we had never before arranged round tables, workshops, lectures and training sessions for communications between NGOs and the media.

Moreover, we had never interacted with so many activists before from such a wide span of the whole Central Asian region. These are determined and decisive people dedicating their lives to the fight for universal values. Among them are victims of human rights abuses as well as people dedicated to changing the situation for the better. Within this project, we have worked with representatives of NGOs, government institutions, general experts, journalists, and local residents.

We, members of the IWPR staff, are neither lawyers nor legal scholars, yet we set ourselves the ambitious task of connecting human rights defenders (with their knowledge of the area, and their experience of lobbying and public campaigns) to journalists (who can convey information to the population at large). Before starting the project, we estimated that both parties needed such a link to be able to work more effectively. Human rights activists do not always understand how to speak comprehensibly to a mainstream audience, while journalists sometimes lack a deep knowledge of human rights issues.

We separately determined the most urgent elements of the problem for each of the countries of the region and focused on our goal. In launching our campaign in the regional centres, then moving to the capital cities, and finally taking it to the supra-regional level, we publicised these problems at the highest level. Finally, two years later, we have managed to create an informal partnership network all across the region and increased legal knowledge in doing so.

IWPR's peculiarity is its supra-regional perspective, combined with an awareness of each country's specific character. We have been in every corner of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. And we have achieved what we thought was impossible: we invited our colleagues from Uzbekistan and

Turkmenistan, as well as dissidents based abroad, to share their experiences and to take part in the regional discussions.

Certainly, we would have failed without our partner organisations, who were professional in all their activities. I am grateful to all those I have worked with for the mutual support and trust they have shown.

Thanks to our colleagues too for their patience. Self-criticism, perfectionism and a distinct separation of power have been our companions these two years. The team spirit we have now did not come easily to us, but our enthusiasm and motivation helped us stage events at the highest level.

During this time we have grown alongside our partners. I have been pleased to see feedback on social networking sites, where participants in our training sessions give positive comments about the events. The people we have trained will one day become trainers themselves, will hold high political offices, will go to study abroad.

It is pleasant that despite the complex topics and strict requirements of our editors, the flow of those wishing to write articles for us and engage with our international audience remains strong.

This project has once again proved that we, all dwellers in the Central Asian region, have much in common. We are quick to understand each other when we get together. We can discuss some issues so enthusiastically that we can feel no differences between the guests, whether they are officials or NGO representatives.

All borders become artificial. Our people in Central Asia are lovers of liberty, friendship and hospitality. So my wish for the future is that everything stays just the way it is. And one more wish is for us to work so that our children will thank us for what we have done today.

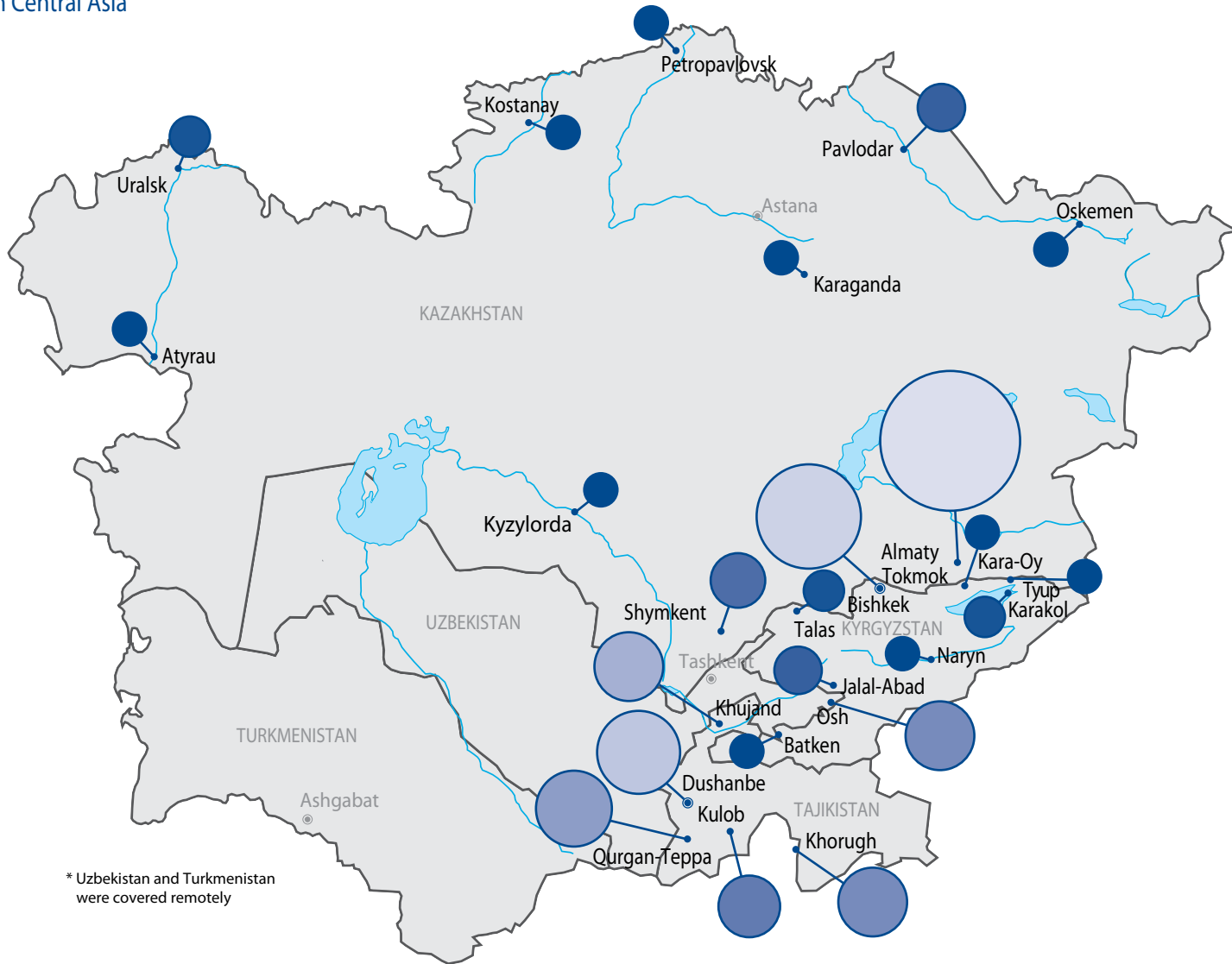
I am confident that traditions, our culture and our mindset can evolve, based on the realities of the modern world, so our most precious possession will benefit everyone now and in the future. The first phase of our human rights project is ending. The second phase is awaiting us with its new challenges and a yet deeper immersion in the human rights environment. Hopefully, it will be approved by our donors. Goodbye for the moment, dear friends!

Sincerely, **Abakhon Sultonazarov**

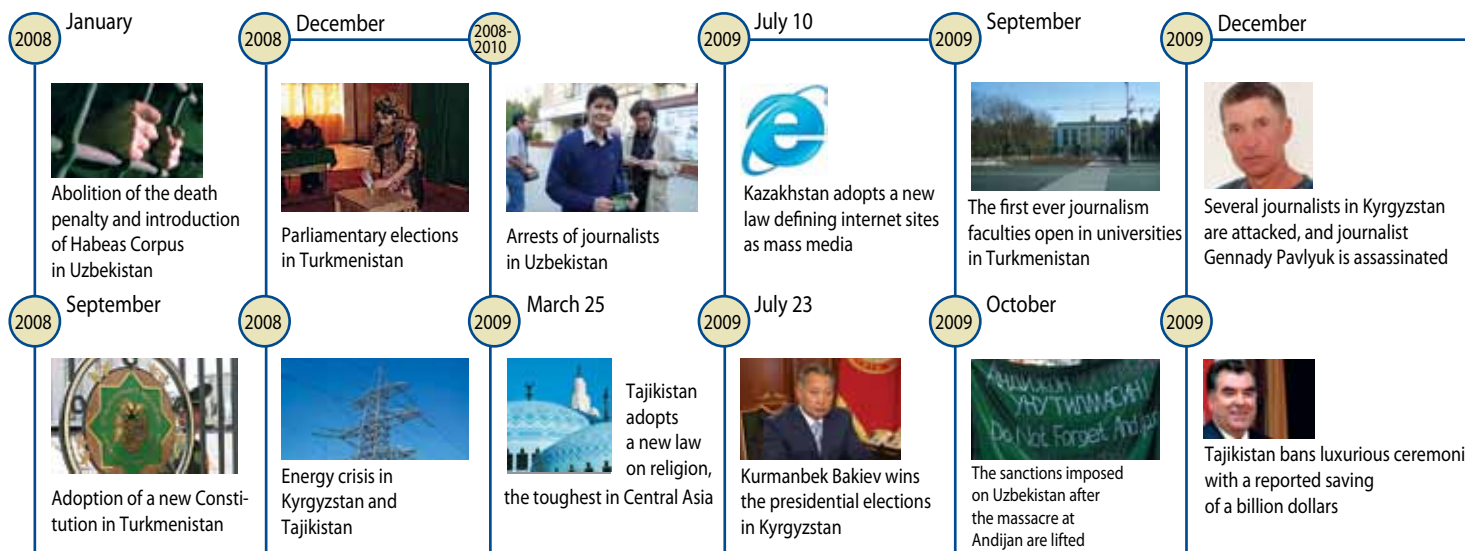
IWPR ACTIVITIES IN THE "BUILDING CENTRAL ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION AND EDUCATION THROUGH THE MEDIA" PROJECT, FINANCED BY EU / NORWAY

Project implementation period: March 2009 - March 2011

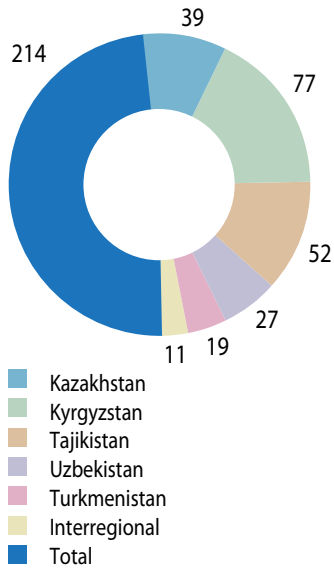
Location of the main IWPR events In Central Asia



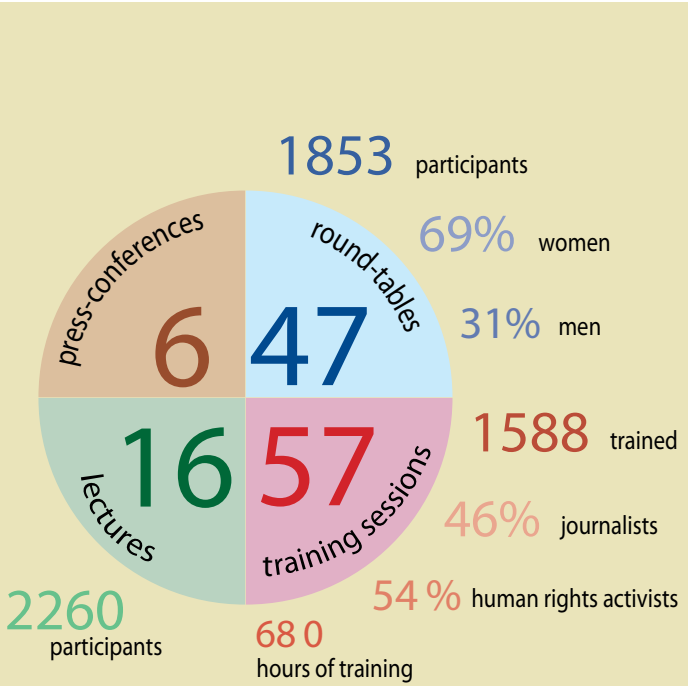
Chronology of events



Number of articles by country published in the two-year period



Percentage of articles by subject in the two-year period



Printed materials

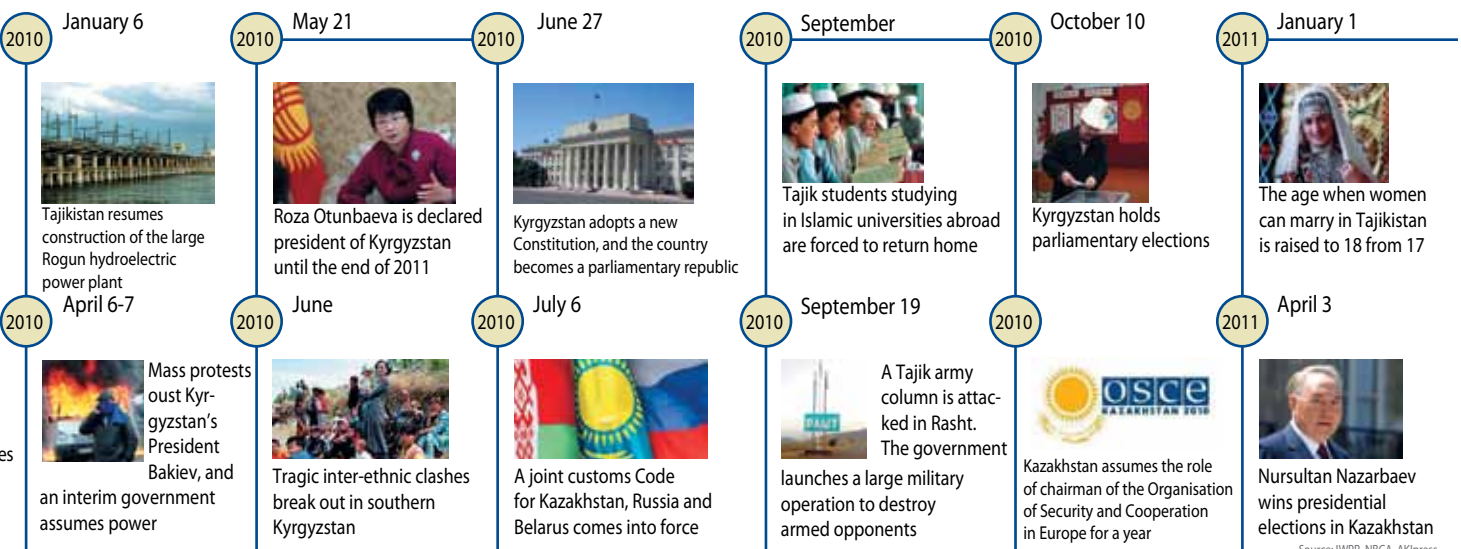


total production of printed materials

10000



48 journalists across the region are permanent contributors to the IWPR website on human rights issues
 IWPR conducts joint activities with 109 human rights NGOs
 IWPR has 43 partner organisations in the five countries of the region
 IWPR events were covered in 15 Central Asian media outlets
 The Central Asia section of the IWPR web site had more than 500.000 unique visitors over the two years (41% read in English, 44% in Russian, 15% in local languages)



Source: IWPR, NBCA, AKIpress, Asia-Plus, Regnum.



PARTICIPANTS IN IWPR'S REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Search

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Sergei Naumov
NBCA
media expert



Davlat Nazri
head of the information department of Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry



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Yuri Gusakov
director of the Karaganda regional branch of Kazakhstan's International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law



Dinara Oshurahunova
leader of the Coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society"



Nuriddin Karshiboev
director of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT), a media rights organisation



Abdumomun Mamaramimov
member of the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission, chairman of the "Voice of Freedom" organisation, editor-in-chief of the "Voice of Freedom" newspaper



Murat Abenov
member of Kazakhstan's parliament



Alena Aminova
freelance journalist



Nargis Zakirova
head of Tajikistan's International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law



Sardar Bagishbekov
head of the "Voice of Freedom" organisation



Adil Nurmakov
Central Asian Regional Editor for "Global Voices Online"



Vyacheslav Abramov
director of Freedom House's Representative office in Kazakhstan



Vasily Markov
freelance journalist



Surat Ikramov
leader of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan



Guljamal Sultanalieva
head of Door eli, acting head of the Council on Human rights, Kyrgyzstan



Ulugbek Babakulov
editor in chief of MK-Asia



Bektur Iskender
co-founder and editor of the Kloop Media news and blogging platform



Mukhhamadi Ibdulloev
executive director of Citizens' Initiative on Internet Policy (GIPI), Tajikistan



Vyacheslav Mamedov
leader of the Civic Democratic Union of Turkmenistan, the Netherlands



Alla Kuvatova
executive director of the Association of NGOs for gender equality and prevention of violence against women



Andrei Grishin
editor of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law



Tashpulat Yuldashev
Uzbek independent political analyst, USA

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PROJECT NEWS

CENTRAL ASIA GENDER ACTIVISTS SHARE EXPERIENCE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

On March 29-30, 2011, a regional round table hosted by IWPR in Dushanbe discussed “The Issues of Domestic Violence in Central Asia. Mechanisms of Counteraction”.

The two days of discussions featured delegates from four of the region’s countries – Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – and included representatives of governments, law enforcement bodies and parliaments, as well as judges and representatives of public and international organisations. The round table was organised jointly with the Board for Women’s Affairs of the Government of Tajikistan. Owing to the regional format, the round table enabled experts to share information on laws affecting victims of domestic violence, on crisis centres and on human rights NGOs, as well as to look at the problems posed by media coverage of this most delicate of topics in all five states of Central Asia.

STATE OF THE PROBLEM



According to western experts, every year 1.8 million women and, remarkably, 2 million men, suffer from domestic violence. Participants of the event described the situations in their countries. According to Alтынay Omurbekova, a member of the Kyrgyz parliament, 87 per cent of women convicted of murder or attempted murder in her country have been exposed to domestic violence from their families for an extended period.

“Lately, the total number of new arrivals at crisis centres in the Kyrgyz Republic has increased, with 60 per cent of them being victims of domestic violence. More than 80 per cent of violence against women in Kyrgyzstan occurs within the family,” she said. Bubusara Ryskulova, the director of the Sezim Crisis Centre, quoted police data showing that “violence in families for the first 10 months of 2010 resulted in seven killings, 10 cases of serious bodily harm and 37 minor injuries”.

“The latent character of the violence makes it difficult to understand the size and depth of the problem,” said Irina Unzhakova, chairman of Status Women’s Federation Public

PROJECT NEWS

Association, and member of the Kazakh president's National Board for Women's Affairs, Family and Demography Policy. "According to the Ombudsman for human rights, in 2008 crisis centres of Kazakhstan received 21,679 calls, the majority of which were from the victims of physical and psychological violence."

However, she said often the victims took no action beyond calling the crisis centre and the violence continued. Asiya Hairullina, chairman of Women of the Creative Intelligentsia, added that the problems of early marriages and teen pregnancy were very serious in Kazakhstan.

The problem is serious in Uzbekistan as well. According to the monitoring group of the Medical Legal Centre in Bukhara, 260 women were brought to the hospital's emergency department by ambulance in 2009. At the same time, as Vahid Karimov, expert of the centre, noted, "there are only a handful of

cases reported when the abuser has been brought to trial because, according to police officers and doctors treating the victims of violence, the focus has been put on reconciliation".

In Tajikistan, Tatyana Bozrikova of the From Legal to Real Equality coalition told the round table that 47.1% of men surveyed think women's main task is to bear children and be a good housewife.

At the same time, from January to September 2008, 240 cases of suicide among women were registered in Tajikistan, and the main cause of the "epidemic" of women's suicides was untrammelled domestic violence. Discrimination against women in the family is worst in rural areas, where it is promoted by non-official forms of marriages (polygamy, theft of brides, early marriages and religious marriages). Experts emphasised the need for more work to punish the criminals in such cases, and rehabilitate the victim.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Tajikistan is close to adopting a law that will help prevent domestic violence. IWPR in Tajikistan has previously supported an extensive lobbying campaign in favour of this law by women's NGOs. Ryskulova of Kyrgyzstan pointed out that the law will help improve the status of women, yet it is not enough on its own. Oynihol Bobonazarova, chairman of Perspective Plus, based in Tajikistan, agreed with her. "We should think

not only about passing the law, but also about moving forward and elaborating mechanisms to achieve the best results in implementing this law," she said. Participants noted the importance of Tajikistan's introduction of family courts, as mentioned by Larisa Kabilova, representative of the Supreme Court of Tajikistan.

PUBLICITY

At the round table, Ryskulova suggested holding teleconferences devoted to the issues of domestic violence among Central Asian states. She said this would not be too expensive and would attract the attention of officials. "There is still some rivalry between the heads of the states, so we hope these teleconferences would make our governments introduce changes," she said.

The session also discussed the idea of halfway houses, the first of which was opened in Kyrgyzstan in March. As Abakhon Sultonnazarov, IWPR Regional Director, said: "we should help women solve their problems, not become a part of the problem". He added that IWPR is willing to help promote any future initiatives in this area.

Participants of the round table drew up recommendations that could help prevent domestic

violence for the governments of the five Central Asian states, for NGOs, for international organisations and for the media. Experts unanimously agreed to regularly monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

Separately, a photographic exhibition -- Women of Central Asia, Domestic violence, Migration, Poverty -- was held simultaneously with the round table. Some 46 photographs by individual authors from across Central Asia -- including David Trilling, Rustam Yuldashev, Zarina Khushvaqt, Valeriy Kaliev and Almaz Kalet -- were selected for the exhibition. Visitors to the exhibition could also see pictures produced for projects organised by the United Nations Population Fund, for the National Society of the Red Crescent, as well as photos from the archives of Radio Liberty, Stan-TV and IWPR-Central Asia.

ROUND TABLES



IN THE FORM OF VIDEO CONFERENCES

Bishkek. July-December 2010

In 2010, IWPR started holding video conferences jointly with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The video was streamed via the Internet and linked experts from different parts of the world. We held six video conferences between Bishkek and Washington devoted to the most important political events in Kyrgyzstan in an uneasy 2010.

Thus, the participants discussed the political situation in the country on the eve of the June referendum on a new constitution. On the eve of parliamentary elections in October 2010 they discussed the perspectives for parliamentarism in Central Asia as a whole. They also analysed the formation of a coalition in Kyrgyzstan and the changes Kyrgyzstan was likely to implement in its foreign policy, its economy and its social situation. The participants from Kyrgyzstan included representatives of all political parties who made it into the new parliament and took part in the parliamentary elections (Ar-Namys, Ata-Jurt, Ata-Meken, SDPK, Respublika, Zamandash), and political analysts. From Washington, the discussion was joined by employees

“Video conferences are a very productive and interesting way to exchange opinions. The discussion about the current political situation with our colleagues from Washington was very intense. Both our side and the American side had strong experts. I think such conferences should be held regularly, once

Shamil Atahanov, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic:

I was a participant in several of IWPR's video conferences with the Carnegie Foundation in Washington and it was a very interesting format. IWPR publishes articles on a wide range of topics - political, social, economic and human rights – and this is a very big job. Its articles are sustained, relevant and based on verified facts. Especially I would like to single out their articles about human rights issues, which are not mentioned enough in our media.



a month,” said political analyst Mars Sariev, one of the participants in the video conferences.

The video dialogue gave western experts the chance to learn about the situation in Kyrgyzstan from the inside, and helped the Kyrgyz participants learn the western perspective on their country. “We live in a world with an unpredictable future and a past that has been extensively analysed. For example, during the June events in southern Kyrgyzstan we saw these analyses appearing in the media. Due to this, the international community assessed the situation in Kyrgyzstan from only one point of view. Such video conferences let us see many things objectively,” Mars Sariev said. Experts pointed out that such a format could be used for communication between experts both within the region, as well as with their colleagues from other parts of the world to discuss various political, economic or social issues. This format can help



Ishenbai Abdurazakov, social activist, diplomat, former state secretary of Kyrgyz Republic:

The more there is expert dialogue between colleagues from different countries, and the broader the range of issues raised, the better will be comprehension of the processes occurring in our country. That means political relations between our states will improve.

of the Carnegie Endowment, by representatives of the U.S. State Department and by representatives of various research institutes. The moderators were Martha Brill Olcott (Carnegie Endowment) and Erlan Abdylbaev (IWPR).

resolve many issues online and in a friendly way. IWPR published press releases laying out key moments in the conversations, as well as transcripts of every video conference, which are available to anyone interested in regional issues.

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

Dushanbe. 16-17 April 2010.

This round table was organised by IWPR with support from Tajikistan's Education Ministry and in association with UNICEF and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – Tajikistan. This was the first round table bringing together people from all over Central Asia to discuss education problems.

More than 60 participants – from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan – took part in the discussion. This year the reform of the education system and specifically the transition to 12-year education in

Culjamal Sultanalieva, director of "Door Eli", acting head of the Human Rights Council in Kyrgyzstan and a former member of the Kyrgyz parliament:

At this IWPR round table I proposed the creation of an Inter-Parliamentary Network in Central Asia for discussing various pressing issues, including access to education. It is obvious that in the region there are not enough ties between the legislative bodies of the republics. We could pass bills based on the experience of our neighbours in addressing similar problems



secondary school, was a key issue for all four of the represented Central Asian republics.

"Today many republics are carrying out reforms in the sphere of education," Hamidullohon Fakerov, head of The Tajik president's Education and Science Department, said. "Tajikistan is also working in this direction and by 2014 it is planning to shift to 12-year secondary education."

In turn, Muhtar Abenov, a member of the Kazakh parliament, emphasised that his country has intended to shift to 12-year education since 2001, but has not managed the change-over yet. "Our country is changing over gradually and methodically in order to prepare all educational bodies for this reform and implement it with the maximum efficiency," he said.

During the round table, the participants noted that the countries' various reform programmes have reached different stages, and all have their own obstacles blocking access to education: from poverty and migration to widespread child labour. Meanwhile, every country in the region has children that do not attend school.

In Tajikistan 2.5% of the total number of pupils do not attend school, while in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan the number is lower at 0.2%. In Kyrgyzstan the round table heard that more than

80,000 children of school-age are not studying. Another common problem for education was the low availability of preschool education, which then has a knock-on effect on all subsequent stages. The participants of the round table drew up general recommendations for heads of government, state agencies, NGOs, the media and international organisations to indicate what problems in education were most pressing.

Muhabbatsho Ruzadorov, adviser of the President of Tajikistan on science and modern technology:

The problem of access to secondary education has not been discussed in the region at such a high level for a long time. This round table was very topical since the issues raised are important for the whole region. It can be said that education is almost a religion for the third millennium; that is why we should pay more attention to this issue. It would be nice to create a common regional educational field so that we could better understand each other and coordinate our decision-making. Such activities are contributing to this.



ROUND TABLES

DIALOGUE TO SOLVE WATER CONFLICT AMONG CENTRAL ASIAN STATES*Dushanbe. 12 June 2009.*

Participants in IWPR's round table on water problems agreed it was necessary to avoid any escalation of the conflict between Central Asian countries over the water in the region's two largest rivers - Syrdarya and Amudarya. The round table, named Water and Energy Problems in Central Asia: Any Compromise? was attended by more than 50 people. Leading experts on water management and water power engineering, government representatives, parliament deputies, diplomats accredited in Tajikistan, and journalists discussed various aspects of the problem.

Uzbekistan was represented by an officer from the embassy in Dushanbe. Participants tried to find points of agreement between the positions of the states the rivers pass through. Despite the heated

debate, everyone agreed that escalation of tension should not be allowed in the relations between the countries, and that everyone needs to seek compromises to escape the current situation.

The participants underlined that the media have a very special role to play during discussion in a separate session of the round table. Experts complained to journalists that their publications often do not help bring about a solution to the water disputes, but actually stir up the conflict. Journalists, in turn, could learn the details of the countries' water and energy relations directly from the specialists. The most positive outcome of the round table was that it created a basis for a more productive dialogue in future between experts from all the countries of the region.

Parviz Mullodjanov, Tajik political analyst:

The problem with water management in Central Asia is one of the most disputed topics in the region, causing many disagreements. With each year this problem will become increasingly acute. The details of this issue should have been discussed a long time ago. Previously we only heard one-sided assessments of these water and energy problems.



HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNET INITIATIVES AND ONLINE JOURNALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Bishkek. 24-25 November 2009

This round table on human rights and the internet was held in the Bishkek Press Club at the end of 2009, the year of Kazakhstan becoming the first of the Central Asian states to give internet sites the status of official media outlets. Media specialists, human rights defenders, employees of international organisations, government employees, members of parliament, journalists, and political analysts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan all took part.

Experts discussed freedom of speech on the Internet in Central Asia and the development of human rights internet initiatives and citizen journalism in each country.

As Muratbek Imanaliev, the (then) president of the Institute for Public Policy, noted: “the internet is one of the new qualitative bases of modern life, and the creation of internet communities and unions is being developed with the help of online journalism”.

Abakhon Sul-tonnazarov, IWPR’s Regional Director in Central Asia, said that the increasing number of people using the internet has attracted attention from both the state and civil society. According to statistical data from Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com), the level of penetration of the Internet in Central Asia as of September 2009 was as follows: Kazakhstan - 14.9%, Kyrgyzstan - 15.6%, Tajikistan - 8.2%, Turkmenistan - 1.5%. The organisation has no data on Uzbekistan.

“Wireless Internet is developing at a quick pace. Obviously, a reduction of prices by internet providers will cause growth in the number of network users,” said Anton

experts paid much attention to the problem of cutoffs, to the security of online magazines and to bloggers. Thus, one of the participants of the round table, independent Uzbekistan-based journalist Sergey Naumov emphasised that currently his home country has “multilevel

Adil Jalilov, the founder of MediaNet:

The internet in Central Asia, perhaps, is the freest information field. The regulation of the internet should be limited to self-regulation. The most effective control over the content will be control of users, while the adoption of laws and other repressive measures would put all internet resources at risk, regardless of their content and purpose.



infiltration from the level of the internet café to the last point of Uztelecom company”.

The main trend in Tajikistan remained the low level of internet penetration, as well as the lack of trained specialists in the sphere of information and communication technology, according to a speech to the round table by Nuriddin Karshiboev, Chairman of the National Association of Independent Media in Tajikistan. He pointed out that online journalism only appeared in Tajikistan three or four years ago and that the majority of online journalists in the republic are self-educated. He supported the holding of training seminars in Tajikistan and elsewhere to cover the peculiarities of journalist work on the internet. Round table participants concluded that Central Asia is currently underestimating the opportunities offered by the internet, blogging, and microblogs. Firstly, they said, this was a result of ignorance. Secondly, according to Artur Nigmatov, a Kazakh journalist, author and editor of the Radio Azattyq website, many network users in the region use the internet primarily for entertainment.

“Internet journalism in Central Asia is in an embryonic form. We have problems in personnel, in technology and in the law. It is necessary to understand that any forms of censorship unacceptable to traditional media should equally not be applied to online publications. Internet content should be independently regulated, not regulated by the

authorities,” said Nuriddin Karshiboev.

The level of development of the internet is determined by human resources. Therefore, today it is most important to raise the amount people know about advanced internet technologies. The event’s main achievement was to elaborate on the measure that could be used to increase efficiency of information resources in the countries of the region.



Artur Nigmatov, a public relations specialist at Radio “Azattyq”:

Civil journalism in the region is only beginning to appear. Its development is directly dependent on the level of civil society itself. The government must ensure the safety of the user in the network, while web resources should ensure the preservation of information.

Morozov, head of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies’ Social and Economical Research Department. “In this regard, attempts by the state to impose controls over the internet are understandable.”

Kazakh officials explained the decision to equate internet portals with the rest of the media as motivated by a desire to “stimulate the development of internet journalism in a legal framework”. At the round table,

IWPR HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING AWARD

WINNERS

Winners in Print Media Category

- 1st place - **Yelena Voronina** (Kyrgyzstan)
 2d place - **Yelena Bratukhina** (Kazakhstan)
 3d place - **Ramzia Mirzobekova** (Tajikistan)

Winners in Online Media Category

- 1st place - **Journalist from Uzbekistan**
 2d place - **Tilav Rasulov** (Tajikistan)
 3d place - **Bakyt Ibraimov** (Kyrgyzstan)

Special Nomination Categories

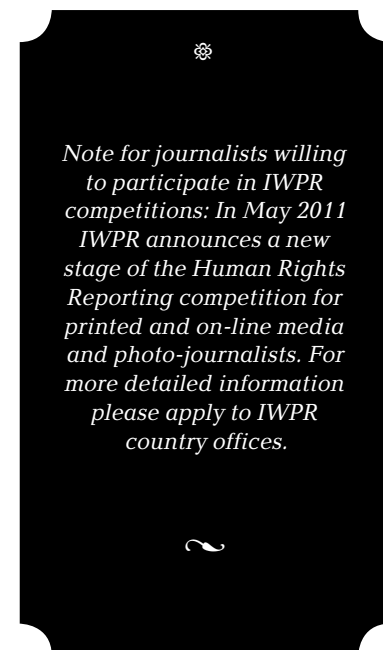
- Children and Women Rights - **Abdurakib Kadyrov** (Tajikistan)
 Torture, Illegal arrests, Imprisonment - **Jasulan Kujekov** (Kazakhstan)
 Freedom of Expression - **Sergei Rasov** (Kazakhstan)
 Freedom of Movement - **Dilbegim Mavloniy** (Uzbekistan)
 UNHCHR Adequate Housing - **Valentina Kasymbekova** (Tajikistan)
 UNHCHR Adequate Housing - **Asyl Osmonalieva** (Kyrgyzstan)
 UNHCHR Adequate Housing - **Mahambet Abjan** (Kazakhstan)
 US Embassy in Tajikistan - **Irina Umarova** (Tajikistan)
 US Embassy in Tajikistan - **Fazliddin Hodjaev** (Tajikistan)

IWPR held a human rights reporting contest for the best coverage of human rights issues. Awards ceremonies for journalists from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were held in December, 2010 in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The winners were given a bronze statuette in the form of a pen, a diploma and a \$300-\$1000 prize depending on the nomination. The contest was announced in 2009. Since then IWPR has received over a hundred applications from four of the Central Asian

countries, from journalists working for both state and private media organisations, as well as from freelancers. The jury included seven qualified human rights activists, journalists and lawyers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Vyacheslav Abramov, Andrei Grishin, Sardar Bagishbekov, Shamalro Maychiev, Oinikhlo Bobonazarova, Shakhlo Akobirova, Khakimjon Khusainov. The scale of the contest forced judges to adopt imaginative approaches. "At first we were judging separately, then we met (with

the help of a Skype conference) to choose the winners,” said Khakimjon Khusainov, a jury member from Uzbekistan.

The experts said that such contests contribute to improving professional standards as well as encouraging coverage of human rights issues. The participants said that often journalists avoid human rights themes to avoid trouble from the authorities. “Developing the public’s awareness of human rights will help to force official human rights institutions that so far are ignoring many violations to take action,” said Tajik journalist Ramzia Mirzobekova, who was awarded third place in the print media category. Kazakh journalist Jasulan Kujekov, a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist, who won the reports about prisoners category, said he previously wrote about the oil business, but since he turned to doing human rights reports he



just wants to continue.

“This is not only my victory, it is victory for all the children I wrote

about,” said Yelena Voronina, a human rights activist from Kyrgyzstan, who was awarded first place in the print media section.

“This ceremony was a real celebration for us,” said Tajik journalist Valentina Kasymbekova, noting that members of the Tajik parliament and officials, as well as people from local NGOs and international organisations all came to the ceremony.

Fiona Frazer, UNHCHR’s regional officer in Central Asia, said this was a good initiative and thanked IWPR for organising the competition. She also said that UNHCHR would like to renew its support for the Provision of Adequate Housing category next year. The contest was run in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights regional office for Central Asia and the United States embassy in Tajikistan.

REFERENCE PUBLICATION FOR JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

On 13, 15 and 26 October 2010, IWPR’s new publications were presented to journalists and human rights defenders in Almaty, Dushanbe and Bishkek, respectively. Among the new volumes are Effective Communications, a manual, and Human Rights Coverage, which contains recommendations to journalists and NGO workers helping them to better understand each other. Human rights defenders can thus improve the work of their organisations with the media, while journalists can more professionally cover human rights topics. Separately, IWPR translated the guidelines, Reporting for Change (earlier published in English and Russian) into local languages to make it more accessible to local journalists. It is recognised by specialists as one of the best practical guides on international standards of journalism. Also, the

Institute published the manual on radio journalism in Russian.

During the presentation, the manuals were donated to the journalism departments and chairs of local institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as to NGOs and media organisations in the region. IWPR’s publications are unique for combining experts’ experiences in all five Central Asian states. The authors were leading human rights defenders and journalists in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan known both within their countries, and beyond, as well as employees of IWPR. Guldjigit Soronkulov, Kyrgyzstan’s Deputy Education Minister said such publications were essential for educational purposes.

Alexander Katsev, who holds the chair of International Journalism at the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU), said such books helped spread tolerance. “The more books are published in different languages, and the more they are implanted in the

their own knowledge and by their experience working as journalists and editors of radio reports.

“Lately in Tajikistan, as well as in other countries, analytical stories as a genre of radio journalism have become obsolete. This is the most interesting way to

convey information to radio listeners. Therefore, this genre underlies the whole IWPR project and this manual,” she said.

Talking about the newly published guide for human rights NGOs, Nigina

Bahrieva, a prominent human rights activist and leader of the Nota Bene Public Association, said: “for the first time, one book contains practical advice and theoretical calculations on how to establish public relations in the right way”.

The presentation of the books attracted attention from journalists, from officials, from civil society, from universities, from international organisations, and from diplomatic missions. IWPR’s country offices will accept applications from organisations and persons who would like free delivery of the books.



Gulnar Asanbayeva, Senior Lecturer of the Journalism Department in KIMEP:

IWPR’s guide on writing news stories and “Reporting for Change” is a good source for KIMEP students. Our students are looking for opportunities to undergo an internship in IWPR’s Almaty office. As part of our courses we constantly invite editors from IWPR to our classes at the university.

minds of students, the more ideas of tolerance will be in society,” he said.

Sofia Lapina of the Kazakh human rights organisation Adil Soz, said she believed that: “such publications could attract young journalists to human rights topics and help them orientate themselves in the data flow”.

Zebo Tajibaeva, one of the authors of the manual for radio journalists and also Executive Director of Asia Plus, was pleased to hear the enthusiastic reception. Tajibaeva said that the authors had been guided by



Dodarbek Saidaliev, rector of Kulyab State University of International Relations:

The journalism department at our university is in its second year, but still there is an acute lack of teachers and teaching materials. IWPR’s books have been very helpful. Tajikistan needs professional literature based on practical advice.

Askar Aktalov, a third-year student at the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, correspondent of Kloop.kg:

This is necessary and useful literature. It combines the requisite amount of theory with practical advice from experts and journalists, as well as examples and personal experience. Nothing is redundant. The information is applicable to the current conditions in our country.



UNIVERSITIES IWPR BOOKS WERE DONATED TO:

Tajik State National University;
Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University;
Khorugh State University;
Qurgan-Teppa State University;
Khujand State University;
B.N Yeltsin Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University;
American University of Central Asia (AUCA);
J. Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University;
Razzakov Kyrgyz Technical University;
“Manas” Kyrgyz-Turkish University;
I. Arabaev Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University;
K. Tynystanov Issyk-Kul State University;
Osh State University;
Al-Farabi Kazakh State University;
University of International Business (UIB)

BEST JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS

KAZAKHSTAN



KAZAKHSTAN'S AFRICANS FIGHT FOR RESIDENCE RIGHTS

22 Mar 2010

Around 200 people of African origin have stayed on in Kazakhstan after finishing their studies at universities in the country. Despite their long residence in the country, many failed to receive legal status. The central figure of Andrei Grishin's story, Traore, obtained full residence rights in 2004, but since then has struggled to extend his documents. Traore and others interviewed said they faced discrimination forcing them to submit documents that are not supposed to be required. In the opinion of Victoria

Tuleneva, a lawyer with the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights, officials are not showing prejudice towards Africans: all immigrants encounter such an attitude. There are anywhere between 300,000 and one million migrants in the country, most of them seasonal workers from neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Immigrants are seen as easy prey for corrupt police officers, not least because the former are often ignorant of their rights under the law, human rights activists say.

KAZAKHSTAN

Eduard Poletaev, Kazakh political analyst:

IWPR is one of the few journalistic collectives in Kazakhstan that provides international readers with analysis of human rights and comments in English. IWPR has been teaching young journalists effectively for a long time. I know many examples of how journalists who worked for IWPR became authoritative figures in Kazakh journalism.



Aleksandr Egorchenko, director of "Drakkar" publishing house, editor-in-chief of "Market of Kazakhstan stocks" and "Private Money" magazines:

I regularly read articles on the IWPR website and learn about interesting facts and events in Kazakhstan that are not published by other media outlets. I am impressed by the many-sided, systematic approach to news coverage by IWPR, especially in stories concerning human rights. Our society needs such information for the better understanding of people's rights and of the state's democratic principles.



SPECIAL REPORT "SLAVERY COMES INTO FASHION"

4 Dec 2009

In one of the villages in eastern Kazakhstan, officers of the police's organised crime department freed four people from captivity. The region has experienced such cases before and experts doubt this will be the last. One of the reasons for the persistence of forced labour in Kazakhstan is the lack of a regular labour force in rural areas. In the Soviet period, there were training courses for milkmaids, shepherds, cow herders and so on, and that encouraged people to work in rural areas. Young people gravitate to the cities in the search for easier work and better pay, while homeless people are forced to move to the countryside to work on farms. Yana Gerasimova, the author of the article, managed to talk to Kadyrali, a 50-year-old man who was forced to work as a slave. A trained mason working on a building site in the city of Semey, he was mistaken for a homeless person and forcedly moved to a rural area, where he and three other people worked for a long time on the farm raided by the police. His case will be heard in court under article 128 of Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan.



CHILDREN FORCED TO PICK COTTON IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN

26 Nov 2009

In recent years, the owners of cotton farms have tended to hire adult migrant labour from neighbouring Uzbekistan. However, the fact that children receive only a third of an adult's wage means the illegal practice of employing them in the cotton fields continues. To make things worse, there are allegations that local government officials and schools are complicit in forcing children to go out into the fields. Olesia Lysenko wrote about it in her article.

A local farmer said: "all the large farms round here belong to the big fish or to one of their relatives. Take any head of a large farm - he will always have a family member who's a high-ranking official in the district or regional administration". They suspect that the close connections between the larger farm owners and individuals in local government allow them to pressure schools into helping provide a workforce. Adolescents involved in the harvest said they had been threatened with getting bad exam results if they refused to go. Tamara Utelbaeva, spokeswoman for the South Kazakhstan prosecutor's office, condemned the role played by teachers, describing it as "an abuse of children's rights" by people "on whom they are dependent, who will run their exams and give them marks".

BEST JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS

KYRGYZSTAN



SPECIAL REPORT "COUNTING THE COST OF DEVASTATION IN KYRGYZSTAN"

14 Jul 2010

A month after ethnic conflict rocked southern Kyrgyzstan, IWPR published a wide collection of eyewitness accounts telling the human stories behind the bare statistics of June 2010's deaths and destruction. IWPR reporters discovered which parts of the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad suffered most and compared the official statistics on deaths and refugees with the pictures that emerged from their research. A whole team of journalists worked on this material, a group in the capital and another in the south, helping each

other collect data little by little for a broad, analytical approach. Interviewees often had to be coaxed into telling their stories, and many of them were afraid of saying anything. By the time the article was written, many aspects of life in the south appeared to be back to normal, but tensions still remain. People are still stockpiling food, and organising squads of residents to patrol their neighbourhoods. It is impossible to forget everything in a single day.

KYRGYZSTAN

Kubat Otorbaev, head of the National Broadcasting Corporation of Kyrgyzstan:

IWPR stories always provide a detailed, in-depth analysis of the situation; including both its causes and its effects. IWPR's journalists are always addressing the most pressing problems of our society. IWPR should think about how to distribute its content to a wider audience.



Aizatbek Beshov, a correspondent for the BBC Russian service in Bishkek:

In my opinion, the reports of IWPR during the conflict in 2010 (the April coup and events in southern Kyrgyzstan) provided an example for local media. They were balanced and gave the views of all parties involved in the conflict. I think that IWPR's journalists were able to "withdraw from the situation" and thus do their job professionally and without prejudice.



SPECIAL REPORT "KYRGYZ JOURNALISM UNDER PRESSURE ON ALL FRONTS"

3 Mar 2010

A special report by Anara Yusupova about attacks on journalists and the broader situation with the media in Kyrgyzstan provoked many responses from readers. The article said that two journalists died in 2009-2010. Gennady Pavlyuk, a prominent journalist from Bishkek, was murdered in Almaty, while Almaz Tashiev, a journalist in Nookat, died after being badly beaten by eight police officers. Moreover, in 2009-2010, journalists from newspapers in Bishkek and elsewhere were threatened and attacked. Osh Shamy, a newspaper in Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh, received a parcel containing a bullet. The article explained how this situation, along with the closure of a number of opposition papers in 2009-2008, has affected the media climate in the republic. A culture of self-censorship has spread in what used to be the most liberal country in the region. This has had a negative impact on the quality of information received by average citizens in the republic.



SPECIAL REPORT "KYRGYZ AUTHORITIES STRUGGLE TO CURB LAND GRABS"

25 Nov 2010

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan are failing to crack down on a fresh wave of land seizures. Sabina Reingold and Isomidin Ahmedjanov in their special report covered the problem of two communities that have built houses on land they do not own: the Ak Jar settlement which grew up near Bishkek in 2005; and the new Karasu settlement near Osh. Ak Jar, with three thousand residents, has no mains electricity and water. In the case of the Osh squatters, the land they have seized belongs to local farms and the municipality. This is the third wave of land seizures, where people have moved to the cities in search of a better life. Each wave of squatters has come at the same time as a change of government, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in 2005 and in 2010. The state seems unable to form a clear policy to deal with them.

BEST JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS

TAJIKISTAN



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL STALLED IN TAJIKISTAN

16 Oct 2010

Women's NGOs in Tajikistan have been pushing for a law on domestic violence for over a decade, and IWPR's story prompted a new cycle of lobbying on this very important issue. Gender rights activists are concerned by the attitude expressed by almost half of Tajik men surveyed that a woman's job is to give birth to children and be a good wife. Domestic abuse stems from this perception and has increased in recent years since many men have gone abroad to work, then divorced their wives and left them destitute. Some

240 suicides were registered in January- September 2009 and the main reason for this "epidemic" was the authorities' failure to crack down on domestic violence. After this article and a series of round tables conducted in all regions of the country, NGOs managed to force parliament to agree to adopt a law on domestic violence. A parliamentary working group was created including women's NGOs. According to one activist, the law on domestic violence is expected to be passed in 2011.

TAJIKISTAN

REVIEW URGED FOR EX-GUANTANAMO TAJIKS

23 Jun 2010

The story was IWPR's most widely read story from Tajikistan in 2010. It provoked wide debate and was republished all across the internet and in local media outlets. It described two Tajik citizens who were accused of being members of a forbidden extremist group and who spent some time in the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay. After being repatriated to Tajikistan, they were sentenced to 17 years in jail. Their defence team said they were victims of human trafficking and had not joined the group voluntarily. They hoped the case would be reviewed by a higher court. The authors – Dabiri Kabir, Daler Gufonov and Parvina Khamidova – were praised by fellow journalists for their work.



TAJIKISTAN'S LAWS BLOCK DISABLED ACCESS TO JOBS

25 Aug 2010

Davlat Shoekhtibor, the author of this piece, which describes people who want to work but cannot because of the law on disabled people, said a journalist from Iran called him after it was published. "They said that they saw my article in the internet and that it had provoked a heated discussion. They have taken it as a basis for their own article on the employment problems that disabled people in Tajikistan are facing," he said. The topic raised in the article was taken up by local journalists as well, such as a story headlined "The disabled have the right to work" which was published on the website of the government's Khovar news agency. Officials admitted the situation was not perfect and said they would intensify work on improving the relevant legislation. Niyoz Qurbonov, head of the labour market department at Tajikistan's State Agency for Social Welfare, Employment and Migration, said his ministry was drafting a new law to give people in all three categories of disability the right to work.

Guljakhon Bobosadykova, gender movement activist, head of the "Women with University Education" NGO:

Thanks to IWPR's article on the progress of the law on domestic violence, many people learned about the NGOs' campaign in support of this law. It was like a new impetus was given to us. Our appeal has been heard and now we can confidently say that the law will be adopted soon.



Khurshed Niyozov, editor-in-chief of "Faraj" newspaper:

After we published IWPR's article about Guantanamo in our newspaper, we got a huge number of calls and other responses from our readers. The article was written to the highest standards. Readers were coming to us and asking us to tell them about the authors of the article, in order to express their gratitude to them.



BEST JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS

UZBEKISTAN



Elena Urlaeva, leader of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan from Tashkent:

Thank you very much for what you do. Your articles allow me to know about the situation in Uzbekistan in its entirety. I know that if I share information with you, you will not distort it, as some media outlets do. The fact that you are referring to human rights issues is a great support to us. It is a huge plus for the development of civil society in Uzbekistan.



UZBEKISTAN'S HIDDEN TRIALS

3 Mar 2010

In late February the secret trial of 15 people accused of anti-constitutional activity, membership of Islamic extremist groups and “inciting ethnic and religious animosity” ended at the Chirchik district criminal court near Tashkent. The law prescribes prison terms of 15-20 years for such offences. Elsewhere in the country, three other trials are going on under a similar shroud of secrecy. Rights activists suggest the secrecy is imposed to hide the fact that the defendants may have been abused before the trials. “It would

be stupid to deny there are people and organisations that disseminate extremist religious ideas here. They’re skilled at disguising their views, but they represent a threat to the country,” a police officer said. Human rights activists disagree. Vasila Inoyatova of the Ezgulik group said her organisation has received around 50 letters from relatives of people arrested for the murder case now being heard in Chirchik. “Under torture, they may be forced to confess to a crime they did not commit,” she said.

UZBEKISTAN

Nadejda Ataeva, head of the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, based in France:

There is very little commentary about events in Uzbekistan. It is important for readers to know, however, how officials react to the opinions of experts, how decisions are made within the framework of the dialogue on human rights. I would like to thank IWPR for their careful attention to readers and experts. Our colleagues, who cannot speak openly because of security concerns, know that IWPR staff members are always careful about the confidentiality of their sources, no matter how hard it may be.



Alina Saginbaeva, CA-News Agency director:

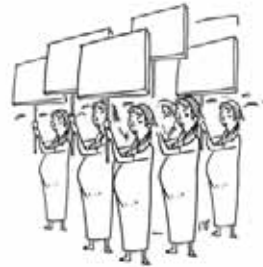
For us it is very difficult to get reviews and analytical articles from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Our journalists are afraid to put their byline on such materials, and some of them are not able to write analytical articles. We are satisfied with the themes of your articles and with their quality. You work promptly and impartially. Thank you for your work.



SPECIAL REPORT "UZBEK GOVERNMENT IN DENIAL ON MIGRATION"

24 Sept 2010

As in neighbouring Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks have gone abroad in large numbers in the hope of escaping the dire economic situation at home and earning a decent wage in countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates and South Korea. The Uzbek authorities do not acknowledge the exodus – and the substantial sums the migrants send home – because the official line is that the domestic economy is booming. As a result, they make little effort to ensure migrant workers are covered by the right legislation, deny them pension and other benefits, and do nothing when their citizens suffer mistreatment abroad. The non-governmental Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders cites estimates that suggest between two and five million of the country's 28 million people are currently outside the country. Each migrant sends home at least \$1,500 a year. Once people have spent several years working abroad, they drop out of the welfare system. The procedures for leaving Uzbekistan as a legally-registered migrant worker are so complex that the vast majority evade the system. Rights activists would like to see the government sign up to international agreements regulating all aspects of labour migration.



COERCIVE STERILISATION IN UZBEKISTAN

11 Sept 2010

Uzbek human rights activists are concerned by a concerted campaign of forced sterilisation for women. The Expert Working Group reported that the health ministry issued a special decree in February which spoke of "voluntary sterilisation", but required every doctor to persuade at least two women to undergo the surgical procedure, and 50 more to use contraception. Uzbekistan's population reached 28 million in April this year, the largest population of all the Central Asian states, and demographic experts predict by 2015 the figure will have grown to 33 million. Sterilisation is seen as the solution. Many doctors agree with the policy, given high maternal and infant mortality rates and the state's lack of funds to pay maternity benefits. However, human rights activists say sterilisation is not always voluntary. For example, they say, "doctors trick women by saying they've found a serious disease that makes surgical sterilisation necessary".

BEST JOURNALISTIC MATERIALS

TURKMENISTAN

TURKMEN AUTHORITIES PLAY DOWN
HIV / AIDS

12 Jan 2011

According to official figures, only two cases of HIV have been registered in Turkmenistan in the last 20 years. But some analysts do not believe this positive picture. “Doctors try to keep silent about AIDS cases. It’s a taboo disease. Medical staff record cases as colds, hepatitis, typhus or cholera,” an analyst based in the northern Dashoguz region said. The government’s general approach is to deny the existence of a problem. In a report last April, the international medical assistance group Médecins Sans Frontières said that “tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections

including HIV/AIDS are more prevalent than reported figures would suggest and the Turkmen government is refusing to acknowledge this reality”. Interviewees also noted that that the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS meant many people were keen to conceal their status and would happily bribe doctors to give them the all-clear. A local journalist who covers health issues said that even when a patient was diagnosed with the virus, often he would not receive the appropriate treatment because of the atmosphere of denial.

TURKMENISTAN

Vyacheslav Mamedov, leader of the Civic Democratic Union of Turkmenistan, the Netherlands:

IWPR delivers a strong service in informing the public about the situation inside such closed countries as Turkmenistan. I really respect its unbiased, objective approach to writing articles about the situation on human rights, refugees and political prisoners.



Sasha Kulaleva, head of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH):

Thank you for your newsletter on Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The articles are interesting and useful for us in our work.



Sergey Khvan, editor of the English-language newspaper "The Times of Central Asia" in Bishkek:

We have been reading IWPRs articles for many years and have reprinted some of them. We usually take your articles about Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the economic issues, since such information is very rare. All articles are written in very good English, and professionally structured. It is also very impressive that IWPR does not forget about features.



NO LIGHT ON HORIZON FOR TURKMEN NGOS

13 Aug 2009

Incoming Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov promised to relax the rigid controls imposed by the state, but NGOs say their position has not improved. Even associations pursuing such innocent aims as helping the elderly and beekeeping are still finding that their applications to register with the authorities are blocked at every turn. On the face of it, Turkmenistan has a healthy civil society numbering several hundred groups. However, these are either government-sponsored institutions working on behalf of women, children, and veterans of the Second World War; or semi-commercial ventures supporting the arts, sports and business. All of them are sanctioned and controlled by government, so this select band faces no real problems registering. Even so, according to one local analyst, only about 150 of the government-approved NGOs that exist on paper actually operate; the rest are defunct. Other NGOs find their applications are turned down or else the registration process is dragged out for years.



TURKMEN GOVERNMENT'S DEMOLITION CAMPAIGN CRITICISED

23 Feb 2010

Last year, dozens of people in Ashgabat and in regional centres lost property as a result of a government drive to improve cities by building parks, fountains and mosques. In some cases, single-storey private houses with no running water are being demolished to be replaced by multi-storey apartment blocks with all conveniences. Residents say that they are being forcibly evicted. An elderly resident of Ashgabat was offered a small flat in a newly-built part of the city but got no compensation for the difference in size between the flat and her old house or for the loss of her plot of land. Officials are using bureaucratic excuses to deny proper compensation to people who have lost their homes. The majority of people are afraid of standing up for their rights because they are put under pressure if they do so. An anonymous Ashgabat-based analyst did say, however, that things had improved since the Niazov era when people were sometimes given no notice prior to eviction.



IWPR TRAINING

In the last two years IWPR has held **57** training sessions for NGOs and mass media in cities and towns all across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Representatives of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have also come to those countries to take part in the events. **More than one and a half thousand people have been trained** in total. IWPR's trainings are unusual because every trainer uses specially developed modules designed for the specific character of every country and region. Participants in the sessions stress the practical value of the training they undergo. IWPR has also begun **to exchange trainers between countries**, since we have learned from experience that a session delivered by an accomplished specialist from another country increases participants' trust in the information presented. Such an exchange also promotes the development of regional ties between experts all across Central Asia. Here is a list of the major components of our training work in

Central Asia **over the last two years**

TRAINING ON EFFECTIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN NGOS AND THE MEDIA, PUBLIC OUTREACH

Trainers:

Nuriddin Karshiboev, director of media rights organisation National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT) (Tajikistan), Irina Chistyakova, Caresd.net project coordinator (Kyrgyzstan), Abdumomun Mamaraïmov, chairman of "Voice of Freedom" public fund, editor-in-chief of the "Voice of Freedom" newspaper (Kyrgyzstan), Elena Voronina, journalist and human rights activist (Kyrgyzstan), Rukhshona Olimova (Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation—Tajikistan), Azalkhon Olimov, lawyer and analyst at Human Rights Center in Khujand (Tajikistan).

Larisa Yanina, a journalist from the "Dialogue" newspaper from Taldykorgan and participant in a training session:

Thanks to the training from IWPR I have strengthened my links with civil society organisations in my area. We participated in training together and have thus become partners in our work. Now our newspaper is providing information about Jasyl el, a youth organisation in the city, as well as widely publicising the activities of the Ardager club, which helps veterans.



The main purpose of the training sessions in this category was to teach journalists and representatives of human rights NGOs how to effectively interact with each other in the coverage of human rights issues. During the sessions, participants considered various mechanisms of cooperation in covering and promoting human rights issues, learned how to effectively use public relations techniques, and discussed the peculiarities of the coverage of human rights topics in the media. Special attention was paid to practical exercises during which participants analysed the problems that arise during the work of human rights NGOs and the media, and discussed possible solutions to them. Trainers noted that the emphasis during such sessions was placed on practical work since the training was based on the fact that NGOs and the media already have experience of a certain amount of interaction. During the sessions, participants analysed in detail how to establish contacts with the media, how to organise press conferences, how to write press releases and how to conduct interviews. Participants said they could not have learned such skills anywhere else. "This training showed us, both human rights NGOs and journalists, what we have in common. It was especially useful to hear about trainers' personal experiences,

IWPR TRAINING

analyse the examples and discuss urgent human rights topics. By using the media, we are able to influence the authorities more efficiently on human rights issues,” said Abdunazar Mamatislamov, a coordinator of the Human Rights Protection Centre, from Klym Shamy in the Jalal-Abad region.

TRAININGS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS JOURNALISM

Trainers:

Andrei Grishin, Vyacheslav Abramov (*Freedom House Kazakhstan*),

Ulugbek Babakulov, *editor-in-chief of “MK-Asia”*,

Leila Saralaeva, *AP correspondent*,

Aida Kasymalieva (*IWPR*),

Dina Tokbaeva (*IWPR*), Igor Gorbachev (*IWPR*), Lola Olimova (*IWPR*) and Khurshed Atovullo, *editor-in-chief of “Faraj” newspaper*

Journalists and employees of human rights organisations were trained in how human rights issues are covered by the international media. These training sessions provided an opportunity to learn how to report on human rights – the methods, the details, various aspects of relations between journalists and sources, including investigative journalism. Trainees in this category received theoretical knowledge in the field of human rights journalism, and discussed such work’s principles and approaches. Trainers shared their own practical experience of covering human rights issues in various genres. The main emphasis was put on how to avoid making mistakes when covering human rights issues, how to work with vulnerable groups and how to present information so that it will be interesting to the widest range of readers. The trainers paid particular attention to the legal aspects of the work, in particular how the mechanisms of defending human rights are reflected in national legislation and international law. Participants received specific instructions on handling the courts and on how to appeal court decisions, including how to appeal to international institutions. Participants said these training sessions gave them a lot of new ideas and filled them with enthusiasm. Interaction both within the group and with the trainer allowed the participants to learn how to soberly assess a human rights situation, and how to look at familiar things from a new perspective. They also got to meet colleagues working in the same field as them from all across Central Asia. In the space of just a few days they could receive knowledge that others only learned through many years of work. Many participants in these sessions later became contributors to IWPR’s news reports.

Bektour Iskender, co-founder and editor of Kloop Media, trainer on new media in human rights:

Working as a trainer for IWPR has given me the opportunity to meet human rights defenders in Central Asia, and it was well worth it. In our country a large part of the public is biased against activists, describing them as “grant-eaters”. I have always tried to resist such stereotypes, and every time I’ve worked with them I have confirmed that human rights defenders are mostly brave people, and in many regions they are doing work that should be done by the government



TRAINING ON INTERNET LITERACY AND NEW MEDIA

Trainers:

Vyacheslav Mamedov, *leader of Civic Democratic Union of Turkmenistan, the Netherlands*, Adil

Nurmakov, (*Global Voices Online*), Bektour Iskender (*Kloop*), Rinat Tukhvatshin (*Kloop*)

The main objective of the training sessions in this category was to raise the awareness of human rights defenders and journalists about the risks that can be presented by using the internet, and to teach them how to protect personal and commercial data. During the three day session each participant performed practical exercises to reinforce their skills. Vyacheslav Mamedov, the leader of the Civic Democratic Union of Turkmenistan, who has extensive personal experience in conducting training sessions on this topic for activists around the world, helped run the sessions. “It is always important that you know emails can be available to third parties. The worst thing

IWPR TRAINING

Rukhshona Olimova, Media Program Coordinator for Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation—Tajikistan, a trainer:

In 2010 I conducted several training sessions for IWPR on the development and establishment of communication strategies for human rights defenders. The sessions took place in Dushanbe, Khujand and Kurgan-Tyube. For me it was amazing to learn that most human rights activists had no idea about communication strategies. They could not write a press release or hold a press conference, despite the fact that they are doing great and serious work. Cooperating with IWPR gave me ideas for the activities of NGOs in the region. I have met more than 90 representatives of such organisations, and some of the participants in the training sessions are still in touch with me. They are keeping me informed me about their progress and asking me questions about how to communicate with the media. In the provinces human rights activists are more active and they are openly talking about their problems, trying to solve them with our help.



that can happen is that someone does not know this and will therefore not use any mechanisms to protect their data,” he said. Khudonazar Mamadnazarov, from Tajikistan’s Office of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, said that the session really opened his eyes. “Previously I was well aware of IT, because my work is tightly connected to it, but here I understood that my knowledge was not enough. Such training for employees of small and large associations, human rights defenders and journalists should be regularly conducted. For Tajikistan such training is a great rarity,” he said.

Vladislav Yuritsyn, a journalist from the internet site Zonakz.net, said the training expanded his ideas about working with the internet. “With the help of practical exercises I received a detailed understanding about things which before I had only heard about. This will definitely be useful for the organisation I work for,” he said. Other participants confirmed that the recommendations and knowledge gained during the training will be useful for them in their use of the internet. They said it was important to create a culture in which internet resources are used correctly during the everyday work of human rights groups and journalists.

TRAINING SESSIONS ON RADIO JOURNALISM

Trainers:

Shahodat Soibnazarova, *IWPR (Tajikistan)*, Iskandar Firuz (*Tajikistan*), Sabyr Abdymomunov, *“Birinchi Radio” chief editor (Kyrgyzstan)*, Kaarmanbek Kuluev, *IWPR (Kyrgyzstan)*, Zebo Tajibaeva *IWPR (Tajikistan)*, Nurlan Abdaliev *IWPR (Kyrgyzstan)*, Nazgul Jamgyrchieva, *chief director of broadcasting PTRC (Kyrgyzstan)*



IWPR conducted specialised training sessions on how to prepare radio material and how to use the technology that allows live broadcasting on the radio. Training sessions were conducted by IWPR’s radio editors and by specially-invited broadcasting directors, sound engineers and experts. The trainers discussed the techniques of broadcasting news live and about how to effectively use background noises in producing radio reports. “The ability of a journalist to present the material beautifully and artistically is very important. “A journalist should be expert in both the technology of broadcasting, and in presenting the information

within the report,” one trainer stressed. During the training sessions participants analysed radio stations in their country and learned new radio techniques. Many of the journalists learned skills that allowed them to contribute to IWPR’s radio programmes. “The automation of radio is something we need to work on, and the training was very informative. During the session we could be a director of the broadcasting, as well as newsreader. But two days were not enough, I would like it to be a bit longer,” said Ulan Soltobek uulu, a participant of IWPR radio training from Kyrgyzstan.

KAZAKHSTAN

KAZAK POLICE THREATEN DISSIDENTS WITH PSYCHIATRIC CONFINEMENT



Image-conscious government avoids labelling critics as mentally unstable, but police in provinces still use forcible committal as threat.

The practice of locking away regime critics or perceived troublemakers in psychiatric hospitals largely ended with the collapse of the Soviet system two decades ago, but human rights defenders report that some police are still trying to apply the tactic in Kazakhstan.

These days, it is not high-profile dissidents who are referred for compulsory psychiatric care, but political activists far from the two main cities Astana and Almaty, and individuals who ask too many awkward questions.

Unlike the old days, however, many doctors are refusing to approve an order for treatment of individuals who they can see are sane.

In December, 64-year-old Alexander Bondarenko was detained by police and sent to a psychiatric clinic in the city of Karaganda in central Kazakhstan.

A committed communist, Bondarenko was detained while protesting against the dismantling of a statue of Vladimir Lenin in Karaganda's central square.

He was then held for three days at the regional psychiatric clinic, where staff told him police had filed a statement that he was a danger to the public and must undergo a compulsory assessment of his mental state.

Doctors reassured him that they would not force any treatment on him, and allowed him to leave.

Bondarenko filed a case against the police on

grounds of mistreatment, but the case was thrown out for lack of evidence.

This was the second time Bondarenko had been forcibly taken to the psychiatric clinic. On the first occasion, five years ago, he was detained while supporting a miners' protest.

There have been similar cases in Karaganda, the centre of a mining region where left-wing sentiment is strong. In October 2010, Tahir Muhamedzyanov, deputy head of a miners' rights group in Shakhtinsk, a town near Karaganda, was taken to the same clinic by police. Once again, doctors pronounced him to be sound of mind and he was able to leave.

In 2007, Anatoly Prilepsky was held for almost a week in a closed ward in Karaganda after campaigning for a public commemoration of the end of the Soviet Union.

The overall impression is of a police force that seeks to label troublemakers as mentally unstable. IWPR submitted a formal request to the provincial police department in Karaganda to find out whether this was in fact policy, but although government agencies are required to reply within a set period, no response was forthcoming.

Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the head doctor at the clinic in Karaganda, confirmed that there were cases where police accompanied individuals brought in for possible treatment. But he said the prosecution service had conducted an investigation in January following allegations of forcible admissions, and had found no wrongdoing by medical staff.

KAZAKHSTAN

“We understand that forcible treatment is a serious matter, so we adhere to the law,” he added.

The head of the Karaganda branch of the Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Yuri Gusakov, recalled the region’s sad history as the location of a major Gulag prison camp complex where political prisoners were held in Soviet times.

“The absurd policy of placing dissidents in clinic is still being practiced by our police,” he said. “There’s generally no justification for it whatsoever.”

In the western city of Uralsk, local resident Alexander Puzdrikov accuses police of trying to get him committed in January. Now 37, he has been trying for some years to claim subsidised housing, to which he is legally entitled because he was brought up in a children’s home.

On January 6, he joined a small protest in Uralsk against plans for a referendum to extend the term in office of Kazakhstan’s president Nursultan Nazarbaev. The other participants – journalists and opposition members – were arrested and either fined or given five days in jail. (See Taking a Stand in Kazakhstan on the experience of another participant, journalist Sanat Urnaliev.)

Puzdrikov alleges that police planted drugs on him when he was detained, and then threatened to press charges unless he accompanied them to the psychiatric clinic and signed a consent form for treatment. However, a doctor at the centre issued a written statement that no treatment was needed, and Puzdrikov was released.

The police department in Uralsk denied that any officers were involved in the incident, and refused to comment further.

Puzdrikov has now filed a complaint against the police with the prosecution service.

Cases in remote parts of Kazakhstan often go unnoticed, but the detention in 2007 of Nurlan Alimbekov, a writer from the southern city of Shymkent, sparked a campaign by media and human rights groups including the New York-based Human Rights Watch. Alimbekov was placed in a high security psychiatric institution after he was accused of sending emails said to have insulted President Nazarbaev and incited ethnic hatred.

The international reaction appears to have warned officials at national level off using the psychiatric care system to confine dissidents.

“It is clear that the [national] authorities... have learned from their mistakes and have no desire to create an unwanted international outcry,” freelance journalist Andrei Sviridov told IWPR. “But things are altogether different matter in the provinces, where nothing has changed and the law-enforcement officers are used to doing whatever they like.”

Sviridov said the police targeted local NGO activists, left-leaning opposition supporters and people pursuing individual claims.

“They’re well aware that these dissenting individuals are not of a high enough profile to prompt an international campaign,” he added.

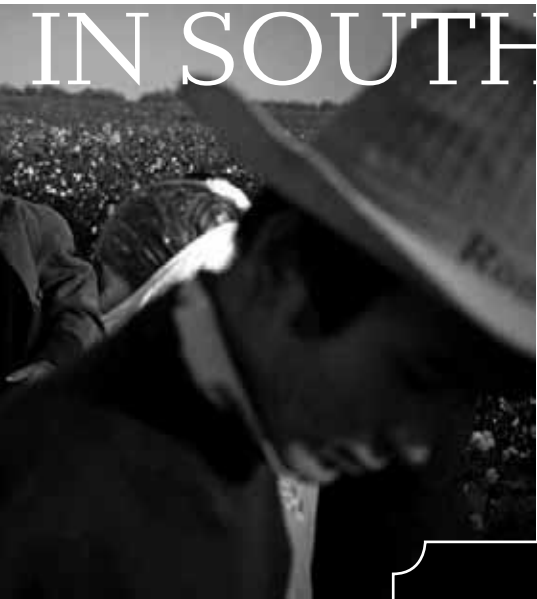
Andrei Grishin is a staff member at the Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law

MIGRA FIELDS



KAZAKHSTAN IN FOCUS

WOMEN ON THE COTTON IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN



❁

Photos by Valery Kaliev.

*Pictures were taken in
Jetysai near Chimkent in
October 2010.*

*The pictures were
exhibited at an
exhibition "Central
Asian Women. Domestic
Violence. Migration.
Poverty" as a part of
regional round-table
on domestic abuse
organised by IWPR in
Dushanbe, capital of
Tajikistan, in March
2011.*

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KYRGYZSTAN

DEEP RIFTS REMAIN IN CONFLICT-TORN KYRGYZ SOUTH



The wounds caused by last year's ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan are still open, with mistrust between divided communities running deep, and local people worried for their security and their long-term future.

As the findings of a lengthy investigation into why the conflict happened began emerging, IWPR asked southern residents of various ethnicities, as well as political and economic experts in Kyrgyzstan, to give their view of how things stand just over six months after violence, looting and burning that left over 400 people dead over several days.

The perception of continuing instability and the slow pace of economic recovery in and around the cities of Osh and Jalalabad are prompting a steady exodus that includes many ethnic Uzbeks but also Kyrgyz who feel their skills and education would be better applied elsewhere. The crisis has thus exacerbated the high rates of unemployment and out-migration from southern Kyrgyzstan, and the departure of many of the most capable is likely to de-skill the local population.

A special commission has been probing the causes and consequences of the June 2010 violence, but its findings – presented by its chairman Abdygany Erkebaev on January 11 – have come under fire from some non-government groups who say they are neither as thorough and even-handed as they had hoped.

In terms of bare facts, Erkebaev said 426 deaths had been verified, although the identities of only 381

individuals had been established. Of these, 276 were Uzbeks and 105 Kyrgyz. Another 2,200 people sustained injuries, while the economic damage caused by arson and looting was calculated at over 85 million US dollars.

According to Erkebaev, the commission laid most of the blame for starting the violence on Qodirjon Batirov, a businessman and a leading light in the Uzbek community, and on relatives of deposed president Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was forced out of office by popular unrest in April last year. Others implicated included organised crime groups, drug traffickers, religious extremists and unnamed “third forces” from outside the country.

The commission accused the interim administration that replaced Bakiev and the provincial and local authorities in the south for ignoring the signs of impending trouble. Parts of the security forces failed to prevent weapons being seized for use in the violence, it said.

When the full text of the report becomes available on January 17, it is likely to create some controversy if it takes the same approach as Erkebaev's description of its contents.

One of the investigative commission's members, lawyer Nurbek Toktakunov, has already distanced himself from the report and refused to sign it, saying it was superficial and failed to address the handling of post-violence judicial proceedings.

“If our commission had expressed a view on the

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reports of torture and [other] violations of criminal-law procedures, the public could have come to hope that things might be different,” he said.

Toktakunov earlier served as defence lawyer for Azimjon Askarov, a human rights activist of Uzbek background who has been given a life sentence on charges of inciting disturbances.

An alternative report produced by the Osh Initiative, a coalition of Uzbek and Kyrgyz rights activists, indicated that ethnic Uzbeks were systematically targeted in attacks, and were then turned into the culprits through prosecutions primarily directed at them.

Southern Uzbeks interviewed prior to Erkebaev’s remarks said they felt let down by central government, which had failed to protect them, and by local authorities who appeared to give tacit approval for portraying the Uzbek community as disproportionately responsible for the conflict, despite it bearing the brunt of the violence.

For both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south, the trauma and economic slump created by the 2010 violence are still a reality.

Official statistics indicate that over 37,000 people left the area via Osh area in the first three months after the clashes, but as political analyst Ikbol Mirsaitov points out, that figure does not capture the total number. He estimates that more than half of those who left were Uzbeks, most of them leaving Kyrgyzstan for places like Russia. Kyrgyz, too, were moving out, but often to the north of the country, where the capital Bishkek is located.

Inter-communal tensions remain, and people interviewed by IWPR said the sense of separation was feeding mistrust and suspicion, and was one of the factors holding back economic recovery.

An Uzbek businessman who used to have a café in Osh told IWPR he was now back in the city, but only for as long as it took to settle his affairs before he left for Russia for ever.

He described what made him leave in a hurry. “Several days after I reopened my business in August, in the wake of the conflict, several criminals came to see me. They threatened with a pistol and demanded that I hand over the café to them,” he said, adding that they insulted him with ethnic slurs. “I got out the same day – with my wife and three children, I packed and left for Russia, where we have relatives.”

A builder from Osh who gave his name as Abdumalik said he was finding it harder and harder to maintain his family both because there was less commercial activity and because he was no longer able to travel freely to take jobs.

“I can’t work outside the district where I live. I fear for my life and safety,” he said. “Sometimes I just want to give it all up and head off to Russia.”

A truck driver called Hikmatillo, also from Osh, expressed similar concerns.

“Ever since June, many people have been living in fear of a repeat of the conflict.... Some [Uzbeks] are selling their family homes,” he said. “People are saying that when spring comes, another contingent will leave.”

Marat Nuraliev, a businessman from Jalalabad, said there was a degree of return to normality but people were still very jumpy.

“People panicked at the sound of firecrackers and bangers on New Year Eve... there’s a sense of danger, of the expectation of something bad,” he said.

While neither Kyrgyz nor Uzbeks were thirsty for revenge, “there’s tension there – they look at each other askance, with animosity”, he said.



Nuraliev warned against having a false sense of security, saying winter was generally a quiet time anyway, but if basic economic problems like the availability of petrol and crop seed were not addressed, spring could see “the south explode again”. Popular unhappiness could be exploited by a range of forces with an axe to grind – Bakiev supporters, Islamic militants, and drug barons.

Mirsaitov said the authorities were trying to stimulate economic recovery, but measures like tax breaks would not help until people felt the situation was secure enough to take advantage of them.

Zumrad Tanakova, who has a small shop in Osh, confirmed this was the case.

“Although the government provided a six-month grace period when it did not collect taxes, there’s no way these taxes could have been paid anyway, since practically nothing is working,” she said.

At the same time, comments by other interviewees suggest cautious optimism about future thanks to rebuilding work and government support for families and businesses affected by the violence.

Among Uzbeks, though, confidence in the authorities does not extend to the law-enforcement agencies or the courts which are trying alleged participants in the violence.

Hikmatillo, the truck driver, said there could be no peace and reconciliation between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz unless the real perpetrators of the violence

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were brought to justice in an unbiased judicial process.

Others expressed concern at a campaign to promote the Kyrgyz language. In December, Osh regional governor Sooronbay Jeenbekov instructed local government institutions agencies to conduct all business in Kyrgyz, as opposed



to Russian which is also an official language and is widely used as lingua franca among different groups.

Kyrgyzstan's government has long striven to promote the use of the state language. In this case, it is the timing of the move that has created quiet resentment among Uzbeks, who questioned the symbolism of the campaign and the need for it at a time when so many other urgent needs had to be addressed.

Despite the challenges facing the south, Mirsaitov remains optimistic.

"There is a widespread view that the two communities will be able to come to terms. The main thing is for politics not to get in the way here," he said.

Anara Yusupova is a pseudonym for a journalist in Bishkek.

Isomidin Ahmedjanov is an IWPR-trained journalist in Osh.

REMAKING LIFE I



KYRGYZSTAN IN FOCUS

IN OSH



❁
Photos by Igor Kovalenko

*Pictures were taken in
February 2011 in Osh eight
months after several days of
violence in June 2011*

*Photo-gallery is available at
www.iwpr.net*



TAJIKISTAN

TAJIKISTAN TIGHTENS MARRIAGE RULES

Changes to the law in Tajikistan making it harder for foreigners to marry locals seem to be a move to stop Afghan and Chinese nationals entering into marriages of convenience.

The amended legislation, passed at the end of January, requires foreigners to have lived in Tajikistan for a year before they can marry locals. They must also sign a prenuptial agreement committing them to provide housing for their spouse. Since foreigners can only buy property after five years' residence, this provision seems designed to ensure the family home is registered to a Tajik national.

Since emigration rather than immigration is the main problem facing Tajikistan, it is hard at first sight to see the point of restricting marriages with foreigners who wish to settle in the country.

However, experts explain that the changes target two specific groups - Afghans generally, and ethnic Uighurs from China, a Muslim minority in the western Xinjiang province. There are suspicions that some of them wish to secure residence rights and accelerate the acquisition of citizenship, which takes three instead of five years if they are married to a local. Residence gives them the right to run a business more easily, while a Tajik passport opens the door to visa-free travel to other parts of the former Soviet Union, notably Russia.

Explaining the thinking behind the new rules on Stan. tv on February 1, Deputy Justice Minister Abdumannon Kholikov said, "It's no secret that many foreigners enter into marriages not in order to start a family, but to smooth the process of acquiring Tajik citizenship."

The majority of marriages with foreigners involve nationals of countries that share Tajikistan's language and Muslim faith - Afghanistan and Iran - or just religion, in the case of Pakistan, Turkey and the Chinese Uighurs.

Officials statistics indicate that at least one in five of the 2,700 marriages with foreigners registered in Tajikistan over the last five years has subsequently ended.

Nilufar Sobir, a Tajik journalist who writes on social issues, welcomes the changes to the law, which she believes will protect vulnerable women and their children.

"There's a recent trend for Chinese citizens of Uighur origin to opt to stay and work in Tajikistan," she said. "There have been similar cases with men from Afghanistan,"

They often marry impoverished poor women and register property and businesses in their names, she said. Then, when they go back home, they leave the wife behind with nothing.

Aziza, a resident of the capital Dushanbe, was 18 when her mother arranged for her to marry a 35-year old businessman from Afghanistan.

Unlike many women in Tajikistan, who go through Muslim weddings without registering with the authorities, Aziza was officially married. But she later learned that her husband already had two Afghan wives. When he then died, he left everything to his first wife, now living in Europe, and she and her three children were left destitute.

Nigina Bahrieva, head of the Nota Bene human rights group, is concerned that introducing legal obstacles to marriage may contravene international conventions guaranteeing the rights of the individual.

She warned that the regulations could leave women worse off than before, as their husbands are likely to seek only a religious wedding blessed by a Muslim cleric and avoid the complexities of legal marriage altogether. This would leave wives with no rights at all after divorce.

"This approach relieves them of any legal responsibility.... and may leave Tajik women more vulnerable and harm their social and legal position," she said.

Alla Kuvvatova, who heads the Association for Gender Equality and Preventing Violence Against Women, said the prenuptial contract could equally be abused by a wife who might divorce her foreign husband once the home was registered in his name.

Others say the regulations run the risk of casting a shadow over all marriages with foreigners because of the actions of a few. A Tajik woman called Shahnoza described how by the time she finished university and started work, she was considered "too old" in her own community, so she married an Afghan and they emigrated to Canada, where they have settled down happily and now have two children.

Deputy Justice Minister Kholikov said the law would not stand in the way of couples whose intentions were genuine.

Some rights activists say the focus on marriages with foreigners is at odds with the authorities' failure to assist the much larger number of women who end up being abandoned by Tajik husbands who go abroad in search of work, and end up staying.

Various estimates put the number of expatriate migrant workers from Tajikistan, at between 800,000 and one million, the majority in Russia. A 2009 report by the International Organisation for Migration on the plight of abandoned wives estimated that about one third of men working abroad would settle down in the host country.

Faromarz Olamafruz and **Yasmin Khushbakht** are pseudonyms used by journalists in Tajikistan.

TAJIKISTAN IN FOCUS

TOUGH WOMEN'S FATE



Photos by David Trilling

Pictures were taken in Tajikistan in 2009.

The pictures were exhibited at an exhibition "Central Asian Women. Domestic Violence. Migration. Poverty" as a part of regional round-table on domestic abuse organised by IWPR in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, in March 2011.



UZBEKISTAN

UZBEK PRISON ABUSES

When I started working on an article on Uzbekistan, published as Uzbek Prison Abuses Cause Psychological Damage, I realised I would face many difficulties in trying to report in this closed country.

I decided to pursue the story despite warnings from a fellow-journalist from Uzbekistan, who was forced to leave the country after writing about the human rights situation there.

He told me that torture was a subject about which the authorities were hugely sensitive, and that if I called people in Uzbekistan and contacted government agencies, I would be in trouble if I travelled there later on. I could be blacklisted and stopped from entering the country, and there had also been cases where rights activists and journalists had been arrested after drugs were planted on them.

But I wanted to try. Although I am from Kyrgyzstan, I work with an IWPR project focusing on Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where foreign media organisations and NGOs are not allowed to operate, and I am familiar with the obstacles to covering these countries. It is difficult to access information, almost impossible to get an official response, and local contacts are at risk.

What I found particularly challenging about this story was the distress of talking to the prisoners' relatives and listening to the details of abuse they recounted.

The article highlighted the torture and other forms of physical abuse that remain commonplace in Uzbekistan's penal system, which leads to high rates of psychological disturbance. Victims of abuse receive no medical assistance, and information about them is completely blacked out, rights activists say.

My interest in the subject was sparked by reports by various websites set up by Uzbek activists. Talking to Nadezhda Ataeva, head of the Paris-based Human Rights in Central Asia group, spurred me on to write about the subject and to raise awareness about widespread human rights abuses in the Uzbek prison system.

The next step in my research was reading letters from prisoners' relatives, passed to me by Ataeva, describing the abuse and torture experienced by inmates.

Driven by concern for relatives, these people turn to human rights defenders in a desperate attempt to do something for them. With virtually no chance of finding support elsewhere, they hope that human rights groups will somehow help raise awareness about the plight of prisoners and that then maybe something can be done about it.

I began feeling depressed by the horrific information I was gathering, but I was determined to do my job as a journalist properly by putting together an unbiased, objective and balanced report. I pulled myself together, and braced myself to talk to convicts' relatives.

Phone calls to people in Uzbekistan, whether prisoners' relatives, lawyers or psychotherapists, evinced the same reaction. Initially, I did not get much further than introducing myself and telling them where I was calling from before they put the phone down. They were naturally too fearful to talk, and were concerned about the possible consequences both for themselves and their relatives inside the prison system.

In such situations, many suspect that the secret police are tapping their phones, or that they are being set up by a provocateur.

Undeterred, I would call again the next day and try to convince them that I meant no harm.

One man seemed to prefer to talk about the past as if it was too painful to talk about the brutal assaults his relative was now being subjected to. Another informant, however, gave details of harsh treatment so grim that I could only include a portion of the account in the report.

I also contacted a psychotherapist in Uzbekistan, who refused to discuss the subject and instead started questioning me about who I was, where I was based, and what the article was for.

Attempts to contact the National Human Rights Centre, a quasi-governmental institution, were similarly fruitless. A secretary asked me to leave my details and send a written request. Uzbek colleagues told me that this is a standard response to queries from journalists. Officials will not say outright that they are refusing to reply, but they won't send a response, either.

The use of torture in pre-trial detention facilities and in the penitentiary system in Uzbekistan has been widely documented over many years.

After hearing submissions from the Uzbek government and from rights groups in March, the United Nations Human Rights Committee issued a set of damning findings on the country's human rights record. In particular, it urged the government to take stronger measures to end torture and other forms of ill-treatment; to monitor and investigate cases, prosecute and punish all perpetrators; and to provide compensation to the victims of torture and ill-treatment.

Although I have never been to Uzbekistan, I always imagined it as a beautiful country known for its hospitable people and great food. But now, the very mention of the country will inevitably remind me of the voices of people who told me about the suffering their loved ones endured in prison.

Yulia Goryaynova is an IWPR editor based in Bishkek, covering Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

UZBEKISTAN

UZBEKISTAN IN FOCUS

FACES OF UZBEKISTAN



Photos by Andrey Kudryashov
and Umida Akhmedova



TURKMENISTAN

FEAR AND REPRESSION IN "REFORMED" TURKMENISTAN



Despite Turkmenistan's attempts to present itself abroad as a reformed state, people who live there say the atmosphere remains as repressive as ever.

Fear of retribution for anything that might be perceived as disloyal towards authorities has created a climate of silence in which people put up with mistreatment without complaint.

When Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov succeeded the late Saparmurat Niazov as president in 2007, he signalled a change of direction away from total repression.

In some areas like healthcare, education and culture, Berdymuhammedov reversed a series of restrictive and sometimes eccentric cutbacks imposed by his predecessor. But hints at reforms in other areas have either not materialised, or in the case of political pledges such as allowing opposition parties to operate, are patently designed to impress the international community and are not intended to come into being. (See Charm Offensive Belies Turkmen Reality [3].)

As in Niazov's time, Turkmenistan is a one-party police state with no independent media. The security services are omnipresent, tapping phones, monitoring internet traffic, preventing anyone they regard as suspect from travelling out of the country, and generally intimidating anyone who complains about life in Turkmenistan.

Active dissidents and opposition supporters either went to jail or emigrated years ago, so the focus of harassment is on family members, including those of officials who fall from grace in one of Berdymuhammedov's regular purges of government.

"We thought that [this] president would prove more humane than the last one, that the repression would stop and that the fear would go away, but things haven't turned out that way at all," an Ashgabat-based journalist said.

"We're afraid to talk to people on the phone. A lot of people have been put behind bars because they let something slip during a telephone conversation."

TURKMENISTAN

An elderly woman in the capital Ashgabat said she was summoned by the Ministry of National Security a couple of days after she complained about rising prices while on the phone to a relative in Ukraine. She



was lucky to get away with an abject apology after a security officer pointed at Africa on a map on the wall and said, “That’s where they’ve got nothing. We have everything here - understand?”

It does not take much to get into trouble with the authorities.

A resident of the western town of Balkanabat described how both he and his wife lost their jobs after he asked for payment or time off in lieu because he was regularly required to work overtime.

“The managers told her, ‘Go and tell your husband to stop banging on about his rights or we will put you both behind bars’,” he said. “So now we’re both left without work.”

In Turkmenabat, a town close to the country’s eastern border with Uzbekistan, said people now feared prosecution “for a word misinterpreted, for expressing the wrong view”.

In this climate of fear, people knuckle under and say nothing when they are forced to turn out as a cheering crowd for some national celebration, to provide free labour for public works such as cleaning the streets, and for the all-important task of tending and picking the cotton crop. “Voluntary” collections are organised to fund government projects or ensure mass subscriptions to state newspapers.

“Everyone puts up with arbitrary treatment, as they know that standing up to it will have negative consequences,” a resident of Kunya-Urgench in northern Turkmenistan said.

Observers believe the blacklist of people barred

from travelling outside Turkmenistan has increased since Berdymuhammedov came to power

“There are now more than 18,000 names of Turkmen citizens on it,” Timur Misrikhanov, of the Netherland-based Association of Independent Lawyers. He noted that since then the list has almost doubled.

Approached to confirm the existence of a blacklist, an official with Turkmenistan’s migration service said he could lose his job if he showed too much interest in it.

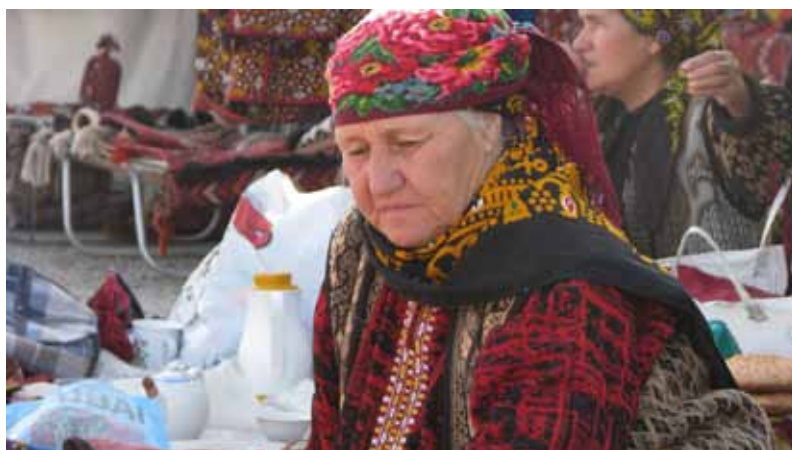
An Ashgabat resident who gave her name as Anna said she had been barred from visiting relatives in Russia since 2006, when her brother was imprisoned.

Police and migration officials told her the ban could not be lifted, and now she does not approach them any more. “I’m afraid that asking about it could draw attention to us and lead to retribution against me and my family,” she explained.

Often, people do not realise they are on the no-travel list until they encounter delays getting the permits they need, or even until they are stopped at airport border controls.

The reasons are unexplained. In 2009, many Turkmen students studying in Kyrgyzstan were prevented from going back there after the summer holiday.

“Some of these young people still find themselves on the black list of people barred from travelling,” said a Turkmenabat resident, who had been considering



sending his own son to study abroad but has thought better of it .

In January, President Berdymuhammedov strengthened the role of the migration service in a move seen as tightening up border controls even further. This followed a speech in September when he urged the security services to take vigorous action against anyone who slandered the “democratic, law-based and secular” state of Turkmenistan.

ASHGABAT SIGI

An analyst in the country was pessimistic about the future, saying criticism had been all but stamped out.

“The authorities will continue to deal ruthlessly with anyone who takes a stand, in order to perpetuate their hold on power for the long term,” he said.

One of the few remaining non-government activists in Ashgabat said the effect was to crush initiative and prevent Turkmenistan developing.

“The security services exercise power in the worst sense of the word,” he said. “To them, every citizen is a potential lawbreaker. This intensifies their instinct for repression, and leaves ordinary people feeling downtrodden.”

Omar Seljuk is the pseudonym of a journalist in Turkmenistan.

Inga Sikorskaya is IWPR’s Senior Editor for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.



TURKMENISTAN IN FOCUS

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*Pictures were taken in Turkmen
capital in 2007, 2009, 2011*



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