

## **Kazakhstani anti-corruption campaigner accused of hate speech, made to undergo psychiatric examinations**

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International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) remains concerned about the case of journalist and human rights activist Alexander Kharlamov, an anti-corruption campaigner from the east Kazakhstan city of Ridder who has been accused of hate speech merely for expressing atheist views and who is at risk of forcible psychiatric treatment.

Kharlamov was arrested in March 2013 and charged with “inciting religious discord,” a vaguely defined offense that carries a maximum sentence of several years in prison. According to the charges against Kharlamov, his “crime” is that he published his own interpretation of world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, “understanding that his opinion is diametrically opposed to the opinion and faith of the majority of religious people and that his actions may result in negative consequences in the form of religious hatred and discord.”

Yevgeniy Zhovtis, chair of the board and expert consultant with Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, has stated that “I have the feeling that common sense has completely disappeared from this case,” noting that Kharlamov has been charged for writing about religion, criticizing religious ideas and presenting his own views on this matter. This is a perfectly legitimate way of exercising freedom of expression, thought and religion.

There are also grounds to believe that the case against Kharlamov may be an attempt to silence him because of his journalist and human rights activities, with his writings on religion being used as a pretext. Kharlamov runs a blog, contributes to several newspapers, leads a human rights group and has campaigned against corruption and abusive practices among local authorities in Ridder by writing articles on such issues and providing legal assistance to citizens who have suffered violations.

In April, Kharlamov was transferred to Almaty, where he is currently undergoing a second set of psychiatric examinations following an initial one in his home region. The justification for these examinations remains unclear and there are that he may be forcibly committed to psychiatric treatment for punitive reasons, a practice commonly used during the Soviet era. Kharlamov himself has said that he believes investigators chose to try to portray him as insane after realizing that the case against him was flimsy.

IPHR calls on the Kazakhstani authorities to ensure that Alexander Kharlamov is not punished for exercising his freedom of expression, thought and religion and that he is immediately released if there are no solid grounds for holding him.

**For more information about the case against Kharlamov, see:**

- Article by Andrei Grishin from Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, "[Kazakhstan Journalist at Risk of Forcible Psychiatric Treatment](#)," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 3 May 2013
- Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, «[Мракобесие становится нормой](#)» (“When obscurantism becomes the norm”), 15 May 2013

A petition has been launched through the online community Avaaz to **collect signatures in support of Alexander Kharlamov**: [in English](#) and in [Russian](#)

**For more information about the current human rights situation in Kazakhstan, see:** [Overview of concerns](#), April 2013