

Freedom from torture

Kazakhstan | Kyrgyzstan | Tajikistan

Issue 4, June 2015

The governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan frequently state their intention to address torture, and indeed, there are signs of progress. In 2013, Kazakhstan set up a National Preventative Mechanism (NPM) and in 2015 new legislation came into force which abolished the possibility of amnesties and the statute of limitations for people suspected or found guilty of torture and strengthened legal safeguards for pre-trial detention. In Kyrgyzstan a fully independent NPM started visiting detention facilities in 2014 and in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the Ministry of Health obliged medical personnel – when conducting examinations of detainees -- to document torture and other ill-treatment in line with principles contained in the UN's Istanbul Protocol. In Tajikistan torture was included as a separate crime in the Criminal Code and in November 2014 the Criminal Procedure Code of Tajikistan was amended to the effect that extradition must be denied when there is a risk of torture in the receiving country. Regrettably, despite these and other positive steps, persistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment continue in all three countries, and impunity for torture continues.

In this context, the project “Action for Freedom from Torture” has taken steps since December 2013 to foster greater regional solidarity and to unite national and international NGOs in the fight against torture in Central Asia.

In this edition

An overview of the activities carried out by project partners under the “Action for Freedom from Torture” project and the successes and challenges so far.



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for Human Rights

The **Freedom from torture** newsletter is published by the **NGO coalitions against torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**, the **Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights** (HFHR, Poland), **International Partnership for Human Rights** (IPHR, Belgium) and the **Norwegian Helsinki Committee** (NHC)

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Participants in the first regional conference of anti-torture coalitions in Almaty, May 2014.

In May 2014 the **first regional conference** of the coalitions against torture in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan took place in Almaty and was attended by over 60 people from coalitions against torture as well as international and donor organizations. The purpose of the conference was the creation of an informal network of NGOs in Central Asia to combat torture. Participants discussed strategies for effective regional cooperation and working groups were set up on different aspects of torture prevention:



The **Legal Assistance** working group oversees issues such as documentation of facts of torture; strategic cases and strategies of regional cooperation; lobbying for the development of effective investigation mechanisms; national guidance for lawyers and investigators.

The **Media and Advocacy** working group promotes positive images of non-governmental organizations in national media; assists with training of journalists; supports national advocacy

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The information I received will be very useful in the future for the selection of strategic cases, ... and in achieving strategic goals

A participant at the strategic litigation training event

initiatives and provides support with distribution of project materials.

A third working group concentrates on **Independent Investigation Mechanisms**, promoting the standards of the Istanbul Protocol and lobbying for independent courts and the inclusion of medical expert opinions in cases of alleged torture.

Finally, the **Rapid Response** working group coordinates swift responses to cases of torture and develops mechanisms to react to pressure on human rights defenders and witnesses. It also works on identifying the political, economic and legislative threats to the work of human rights organisations.

Flawed access to legal safeguards including legal counsel leading to impunity for torture:

The new Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) of **Kazakhstan** that came into force in 2015 significantly strengthened legal safeguards in pre-trial detention including by clarifying that detainees must have access to key safeguards such as legal counsel immediately after they are deprived of liberty. However, members of the National Preventive Mechanism and member organizations of the Coalition against Torture in Kazakhstan reported that, despite the coming into force of the new CPC in January 2015, detainees do not always have access to legal safeguards enshrined in the Code and cases of incommunicado detention continue. However, legislative measures have not always translated into practice and the NGO Coalition against Torture in Kazakhstan recorded between 350 and 400 complaints of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Kazakhstan annually in 2013 and 2014. By 26 June 2015 the Coalition against Torture had registered 45 cases involving allegations of torture or other ill-treatment since the beginning of the year. Barriers to protection in Kazakhstan include state appointed lawyers not defending the interests of the suspected criminal who is a victim of torture, lack of safeguards against torture implemented from the moment of detention and ineffective investigation of torture complaints conducted by law enforcement agencies leading to many being ruled “unfounded”.

In **Tajikistan**, legislation is ambiguous as to when a detained person is considered a detainee. In practice, law enforcement agencies and courts typically consider a person a detainee once the detention record is drawn up. This maybe several hours, or even several days, after the de facto arrest, meaning that during this time detainees typically have no access to any of the legal safeguards such as access to a lawyer. The lack of enough qualified lawyers prepared to take on torture cases remains an obstacle to tackling torture. From 2011 to the end of 2014, members of the NGO Coalition against Torture in Tajikistan

In the first six months of 2015, the NGO coalitions against torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan registered 45, 98 and 20 new cases of torture and other ill-treatment, respectively. Some of these cases relate to several individuals claiming to have been tortured.

documented more than two dozen cases each year of men, women and children who were allegedly subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. In the first six months of 2015 the Coalition registered 20 cases. Only in a small number of these cases, official investigations were opened, and in many cases of confirmed torture or ill-treatment, only disciplinary proceedings were imposed. Torture victims or their family members often refuse to complain about their treatment due to fear of repercussions for speaking out.

The **Kyrgyzstani authorities** have taken steps to address torture in recent years: amending legislation in 2012 so that lawyers no longer require written permission of the investigator in order to visit their clients in detention, and changing Article 305-1 of the Criminal Code to classify torture as a serious crime. However, despite these positive steps, torture continues to be widely used by law enforcement agencies and impunity is the norm. Member organizations of the NGO Coalition against Torture in Kyrgyzstan have documented many cases where no lawyer was present during interrogations. For example, in 2013 almost half of the 831 detainees interviewed by them alleged to have seen their lawyer for the first time at the remand hearing. In its March 2014 Concluding Observations the Human Rights Committee expressed concern “about the lack of implementation of basic safeguards to all persons deprived of their liberty, including failure to register all detainees immediately upon apprehension; the lack of access to a lawyer of their choice; the lack of a medical examination immediately after their apprehension and the lack of access to medical assistance” (Paragraph 16).

Last year, the NGO Coalition against Torture in Kyrgyzstan documented over 80 cases of men, women and children who are believed to have been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment and urged prosecutor’s offices to conduct effective investigations into the allegations. Although the strength of evidence in support of the allegations available to the Coalition in these cases is high, criminal cases were opened in only 16 of them and only very few police officers were convicted. So far in 2015, the Coalition has registered 98 cases of reports of torture or ill-treatment.

In this context supporting defense lawyers working with victims of torture and ill-treatment is a key factor for change. The presence of defense lawyers at early stages of detention can be a preventative factor and also plays an important monitoring role.

In 2014 52 lawyers from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan received training on the national and international standards of freedom from torture, definitions of torture and other ill-treatment, on how to document torture and on methodologies of public investigation of torture and other ill-treatment. The participants worked on practical problems and exchanged information and resources. After the

trainings the Kazakhstani Coalition against Torture reported an increase in the number of lawyers who were willing to cooperate with them. A further 25 lawyers from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan received training in October 2014 on protection of torture victims in court, interviewing skills and on obtaining redress. 30 lawyers from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also received training on conducting strategic litigation that took place in Warsaw in December 2014 from trainers and employees of the Case Precedent Program of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.

Legal assistance to victims of torture: The Legal Aid Centers of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR) and other Coalition members such as Taldykorgan Human Rights Protection Centre, and lawyers who are members of the Coalition provide legal assistance in 11 regions in Kazakhstan. In Tajikistan, legal assistance is provided in 3 regions by Legal Aid Centers of NGO Coalition against Torture members and practicing lawyers.

FIGHTING FOR REDRESS: STRATEGIC COMPENSATION CASES BEING FOUGHT IN KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN

In order to combat ongoing impunity for torture in the Central Asian region, the project aims to take forward strategic litigation initiatives in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to push for compensation for moral and material damages for torture victims. In 2014 four court cases for compensation were supported under the project, two in Tajikistan and two in Kazakhstan. Securing successful outcomes in compensation claims such as these is key to addressing the problems of impunity and lack of redress for torture victims in Central Asia.

In **Tajikistan**, victims of torture and ill-treatment are not usually granted fair and adequate compensation for damages caused.

On 6 March 2014 22-year old military conscript **Shakhbol Mirzoev** was beaten up so badly by a medical assistant of the Border Guards Unit that he was left paralysed. Two officials were found guilty of negligence and violating the code of military conduct and sentenced to prison terms. Although the Border Guards promised to cover all Shakhbol's medical expenses, it only covered some hospital expenses and Shakhbol's parents had to sell their house to cover the other medical costs. The Coalition against Torture in Tajikistan is supporting Shakhbol and his family in their fight for adequate compensation.

The sum of compensation required due to the material and moral damage inflicted upon Shakhbol was determined, after consultations with doctors and conclusions from a psychological expert examination, to be 180,000 somoni (approx. 26,100 EUR).

In May 2015 the Military Court of Dushanbe ordered the Border Guards to pay 97,265 somoni (approx. 14,200 EUR) to cover physical harm and 20,000 (approx. 2,900 EUR) to cover moral damages. The compensation determined by the court cannot be deemed fair or adequate, and therefore Shakhbol's lawyers intend to appeal the court decision further.

Lawyers hired under the project have been actively fighting for compensation for moral damages on behalf of **a teenage boy** who was **tortured in 2012** when he was 17 years old. Law enforcement officials tortured the boy in Yavan in April 2012 after he refused to confess to theft. He subsequently attempted to commit suicide because he could not stand the ill-treatment. Medical reports concluded that the child had sustained serious injuries to his health. In 2012 a law enforcement official was found guilty of torture and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. In 2013 the boy's claim for compensation for material damages was approved and he was awarded 1619 somoni (approx. 235 euros). In October 2014 an appeal for 300,000 somonis compensation (approx. 43,590 euros) for moral damages was lodged against the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan. The court hearing in relation to the claim for compensation took place at the end of January 2015 and in February an examination by a foreign expert psychologist was approved. However, this decision was overturned later that month when it was ruled that the psychological conclusions could be made by a Tajikistani psychologist. The conclusions of this psychologist are currently being awaited so that the court can proceed to consider the civil case.

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The Kazakhstani authorities seem to be dragging their feet with the investigation [...] the overall impression given is that they are less than keen to bring the police to justice for their actions. The situation is critical – not so much with torture but due to the attempts by law enforcement officials to close any investigations into torture by any possible means... But we won't give up.

Snezhana Kim,
lawyer for Rasim Bayramov and Ruslan Baymagambetov

Kazakhstan:

The KIBHR together with lawyer Snezhana Kim fought for compensation for torture victim **Ruslan Baymagambetov** throughout 2014. In August 2014 a civil lawsuit was filed in the Kostanay region seeking payment of compensation for moral harm suffered as a result of (sustained) torture. The Coalition arranged for an independent psychologist to document the psychological consequences of torture in Ruslan Baymagambetov's case for the court. On 3 December Kostanay court instructed the Regional Department for Internal Affairs to pay 300,000 tenge (approx. 1,467 euros) as compensation for moral harm suffered in connection with torture. This decision was appealed as KIBHR and the lawyer considered the compensation to be neither fair nor adequate. Three police officers were found guilty of torture (Article 141) and sentenced to between 2.5 and 2 years imprisonment.

Another example is the case of Rasim Bayramov who was tortured by police officers in 2008. Domestic complaint mechanisms in Kazakhstan proved ineffective, but he did not give up and, with the support of lawyers of the Kostanay branch of KIBHR and OSI

See joint press release issued at the end of January 2015: <http://www.iphronline.org/kazakhstan-justice-must-prevail-for-torture-victim-20150128.html>.

Anastasia Miler from KIBHR and Anne Sunder-Plassmann from IPHR wrote a blog about this case which can be found at:

[http://blog.omct.org/than
ks-committee-torture-
rasim-bayramov-
kazakhstan-awarded-
compensation-torture/](http://blog.omct.org/thanks-committee-torture-rasim-bayramov-kazakhstan-awarded-compensation-torture/)

experts, sent a complaint to the UN Committee against Torture which decided in his favour in May 2014. Kostanay Court, basing its decision on that of the UN Committee against Torture, ruled to award him compensation for moral damages sustained due to torture. Lawyer Snezhana Kim and KIBHR filed for moral damages and won the case through all court instances. They were also active in investigation proceedings to bring the perpetrators to justice, which were conducted by the Department of Special Prosecutors of Kostanay region. On 10 December 2014 a ruling was issued to discontinue the criminal case, but the case was reopened in March 2015 after a ruling by the General Prosecutor's Office. However, the officers allegedly responsible for torturing Rasim Bayramov have not been taken into custody nor suspended from their official duties.

Local, regional and international human rights groups lobbied alongside KIBHR for justice in this case, including member organizations of the Civic Solidarity Platform, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the coalitions against torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

“ ”

I am constantly thinking about – what could we have managed to do by ourselves ? What would we have achieved? I know I could have done nothing alone...

Having the support of such a large group of people as the whole Coalition helped us not to give up the fight and to achieve a lot”.

Natalya Bayramova,
Mother of Rasim Bayramov, May 2015



Rasim Bayramov, who was tortured by police officers in Rudny in 2008, shortly after winning his claim for compensation for moral damages in December 2014 with Anastasia Miler, Director of the Kostanay branch of KIBHR and lawyer Shezhana Kim.

The CPC of Kyrgyzstan stipulates that victims of crime have a right to compensation for harm suffered as a result of unlawful measures and that applications are reviewed by civil courts. While international standards hold that the state is responsible for the damage caused by torture and ill-treatment and has to provide compensation, Article 16 of the Civil Code of Kyrgyzstan stipulates that civil courts can order the perpetrator to provide compensation for harm suffered.

There have been some court decisions in recent years where perpetrators were ordered to provide compensation to victims. However, to our knowledge, none of the victims have yet received

the payments.

Kyrgyzstani legislation provides for compensation only in those cases where the perpetrator of torture has been brought to justice and convicted in criminal proceedings. Kyrgyzstan should act in accordance with universally recognized international human rights standards and ensure that compensation is granted to all victims of torture or other ill-treatment, including in those cases where the perpetrator has not been identified.

Over ten years ago, on 24 October 2004, "S." was arrested on the street by police officers and taken to a police station. His hands were handcuffed behind his back and he was put into an administrative detention cell. At 5pm that same day he was found dead. A criminal case was initiated in November and a policeman found guilty, but he was let off punishment due to having reached an agreement with the victim's family. After many court appeals, S's family complained to the UN Committee on Human Rights which, in 2011, recognized that Kyrgyzstan had violated S's rights under Article 7 of the ICCPR, noting that the government had failed to conduct a proper investigation into S's death and had not provided effective remedy and compensation for moral damages to the family.

In 2015 a claim was submitted for non-pecuniary damages. The court examining the claim referred to the decision of the HR Committee and ruled that it was clear that those responsible for S's death had not been held criminally responsible and that the appropriate reparations had not been made. Thus, the Court notes that the Committee has established the illegality of the actions of officials of the state in violation of the right to life, freedom from torture and the lack of an effective investigation, which is a violation of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic and the international law of human rights. An international expert psychologist, E. Volochay submitted conclusions to support the case for moral compensation for S's family, citing the mental suffering endured by S's mother and sister and recommended compensation of 100,000 euros based on international precedents. On 29 April 2015, the District Court ruled that the state should pay the equivalent of 9,000 US dollars. This decision will be appealed further and therefore the names of the courts have not been cited here.

See also:
Briefing paper: Address
torture in EU-Kyrgyzstan
Human Rights Dialogue,
May 2015

[http://www.iphronline.org/
adress-torture-in-eu-
kyrgyzstan-human-rights-
dialogue-20150518.html](http://www.iphronline.org/adress-torture-in-eu-kyrgyzstan-human-rights-dialogue-20150518.html)

Kyrgyzstan: Moving towards effective investigations into torture complaints

In Kyrgyzstan, official statistics show that in only one case out of ten is a criminal case opened after a report of torture. In fact, since torture was criminalized in 2003 there has only been one case where the perpetrator was found guilty and sentenced. In order to address the inherent conflicts of interest in the investigative

mechanisms, in 2014 Parliament instructed the General Prosecutor's Office to consider establishing a specialized department of the Prosecutor's Office to investigate allegations of torture. The Kyrgyzstani Coalition against Torture therefore prioritized the issue and, in January 2015, an expert working group was established which included civil society representatives and two members of the General Prosecutor's office. The working group is tasked to develop a common mechanism for receiving complaints and reports of torture and for their impartial and thorough investigation. The Working Group's conclusions will be presented to the General Prosecutor's Office and the Coalition against Torture initially, and, if approved, will be submitted for public debate. The co-operation between the General Prosecutor's Office and the Coalition against Torture has been a key factor in moving the debate on this issue forward in practical terms.

An example of the lack of redress for victims of torture is shown in the case below:

Among dozens of cases of torture and ill-treatment documented by NGOs in Kyrgyzstan in recent years is that of **Yuri Marchenko** from Tup village in the north-eastern Issyk-Kul region, whom police abused on two separate occasions in 2011. In September 2011, several officers reportedly held him for several hours and beat him. After his mother complained to the head of the local police and the district prosecutor's office, he was released. On the night of 21 November, when returning home on his motorbike, Yuri was stopped by five men, some of whom he recognized as officers of Tup police station. The men reportedly beat him so severely with fists and metal objects that he lost consciousness. The police left him lying in the snow. It is believed that he was targeted to punish his family for filing complaints about the police abuse in September. He was hospitalized for two weeks with fractured ribs and nose, injuries to his chest and head and bruises and abrasions over his body. A criminal investigation was opened, but it was closed in April 2013 for "lack of evidence of a crime". The criminal case was reopened in June 2013 and charges were brought against three officers. The trial made little progress as the defendants failed to appear in court for trial for many months. Finally, the court issued two defendants with a warning to ensure that they appear in court. The trial started in April 2014 and is still ongoing. A fourth alleged perpetrator was issued with a search warrant but is still at large. The Coalition against Torture in Kyrgyzstan is aware of many trials in torture-related cases that have not progressed for years.

In 2014 the Coalition against Torture in Kyrgyzstan also lobbied for a change of legislation to require **medical examinations** to be documented in line with the Istanbul protocol. The Ministry of Health took the decision in December 2014, a step which will contribute significantly towards improving investigation of torture.

"It is very difficult to prove the fact of torture" From an interview with a Supreme Court Judge, Kyrgyzstan. Under a new project the Coalition against Torture organised a group of three NGO experts to research into the effect of legislative changes since 2010 on the quality of investigations into reports of torture and the potential role of civil society oversight in this area. An analysis of existing legislation was carried out, as well as over 40 expert interviews with investigators, lawyer, prosecutors, judges, medical experts, psychologists, representatives of civil society and victims of torture in four regions of Kyrgyzstan. The group's made a series of practical recommendations to improve the effectiveness of investigations.

The Coalition against Torture is currently aware of many cases where prosecutors or judges did not order forensic medical examinations when a detainee alleged to have been tortured. In cases of complaints submitted directly to prosecutor's offices, delays in forensic examinations mean that evidence of torture has often disappeared by the time the detainee sees the forensic expert.

National and international advocacy

The project networking activities implemented so far have provided civil society activists with increased capacity to document, report and reach out to the international community in their efforts to promote the eradication of torture in their countries. The advocacy activities on the intergovernmental level (UN, OSCE, EU) conducted within this project have drawn attention to the issue of torture. Many of the recommendations made or issues raised by UN treaty bodies, under the UPR or at EU human rights dialogues in the period under review have been based on information provided by project partners.

The project has tried to strengthen cooperation of regional and international NGOs and work on joint advocacy initiatives, and to draw attention to individual cases. For example, on 10 February 2015 project partners issued a public statement and briefing on torture in Tajikistan along with Amnesty International and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

Joint open letter on the day of the Border Guard (28 May 2014)

Project partners prepared an "Open Letter to Lieutenant-General Radjabali Rahmonali, Commander-in-Chief of Border Guards under the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan" based on information received from the Association of Young Lawyers Amparo in Tajikistan, a member of the Coalition against Torture in Tajikistan. The publication coincided with the Day of the Border Guard, which is celebrated annually in Tajikistan on 28 May. The letter featured the case of a conscript, Shakhbol Mirzoev, (see above for case description) who had to be hospitalized as a result of torture he was subjected to by other border guards. The letter concluded with a set of key recommendations to the Commander-in-Chief of the Border Guards in Tajikistan. The open letter was signed by 29 Central Asian and international human rights groups.

Other advocacy initiatives under the project so far have included:

- Raising concerns on torture in Central Asia at the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on prevention of

See: Torture still widespread in Tajikistan 20 years after the country acceded to the anti-torture treaty:
<http://www.iphronline.org/torture-still-widespread-in-tajikistan-20150210.html>

See: Current concerns regarding torture in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan
<http://www.iphronline.org/torture-concerns-in-kazakhstan-and-tajikistan-20150518.html>

See:
<http://www.iphronline.org/tajikistan-open-letter-about-hazing-20140529.html>

Information was prepared and posted to the Tajikistan Anti-torture Coalition website
<http://notorture.tj/video/odin-kadr-vmestotyasyachi-slov-multimediya>
as well as
<http://notorture.tj/video/videoreportazh-akciiskazhem-pytkam-net>;
<http://notorture.tj/analitics/pytki-ot-srednevekovoy-inkvizicii-dovremennogo-tadzhikistana>

torture (Vienna, 10-11 April 2014), the OSCE Regional workshop on implementing human dimension commitments (Dushanbe, 21-22 May 2014) and the 2014 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, September 2014, Warsaw; Participation in EU-Tajikistan human rights dialogue in June 2014; and June 2015; *and* in EU-Kazakhstan human rights dialogue in October 2014;

- Advocacy towards EU institutions (EEAS, COHOM Torture Task Force; advocacy prior to European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights visit to Kazakhstan; numerous meetings with MEPs);
- Contribution to the follow up visit of the Special Rapporteur on Torture to Tajikistan;
- Briefing document on Tajikistan to the Swiss Chief information Officer of the OSCE ahead of his visit to Central Asia in November 2014;
- Follow-up submission to the Concluding Observations of the CAT on Tajikistan, May 2015. Briefing to the HR Committee on the implementation of HR Committee recommendations on Tajikistan, submitted in Feb 2015.
- Shadow report of the NGO Coalition against Torture in Kazakhstan within CAT;
- In May 2015, on the occasion of the EU-Kyrgyz Republic Human Rights Dialogue project partners issued a document, entitled “Torture in Kyrgyzstan: Current concerns and recommendations” which summarizes positive steps taken by the authorities of Kyrgyzstan in recent years, identifies gaps and weaknesses that persist in the legislative and institutional frameworks, and focuses on how the failure to consistently implement existing legislation contributes to ongoing torture and impunity.

In March 2015, project partner International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) coordinated lobbying of the European Council, European Commission and European Parliament prior to the visit of President Atambayev to Brussels. Project partners raised concerns about the continued impunity for torture in Kyrgyzstan and urged the authorities to implement recommendations made by international human rights bodies to put a stop to torture, including amending legislation to ensure safeguards against torture work effectively.

See:<http://www.iphronline.org/eu-use-brussels-visit-of-kyrgyzstanrsquo-president-to-secure-human-rights-commitments-20150326.html>

For a series of EU advocacy meetings in Brussels, IPHR, and project partners including Nota Bene and KIBHR prepared brief overviews of current concerns regarding torture and ill-treatment in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as recommendations the EU is urged to address with the authorities of these countries.



ПЫТКИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ:
ВЧЕРА. СЕГОДНЯ. ЗАВТРА?



Отчет Коалиции НПО Казахстана
против пыток. Июнь 2015.

Project partners also wrote a joint letter to **UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon**, on the eve of his visit to the five Central Asian countries on 8-14 June 2015. The letter raised concerns regarding the ongoing practices of torture and ill-treatment and the increasing problems faced for civil society and NGOs in the region.

Communication and Media

The project has worked to increase awareness in the media and the public about torture and mechanisms of protection of torture victims in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Seminars for journalists on freedom from torture

Two seminars for journalists provided information on human rights and freedom from torture as well as communication skills training to 17 journalists from Kazakhstan and 16 journalists from Tajikistan.

Articles were published in the press in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan on issues related to prevention of torture as well as on the activities of the Coalition against Torture.

Joint press release on the vulnerability of anti-torture and other human rights groups in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (21 July 2014)

Project partners drafted a press release entitled “Anti-torture and other human rights groups vulnerable in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan” highlighting threats human rights defenders and groups face as a result of their work. The statement highlights the lack of sufficient legal safeguards to protect activists and groups to freely exercise their human right to freedom of association and expresses concern at reports that new legislation is being prepared to further limit the space in which groups and activists can operate. It also gives several case examples and concludes with recommendations to the three Central Asian governments. The following human rights groups jointly issued the statement: the three Central Asian coalitions, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR), IPHR, Amnesty International and Article 19. The 2.5-page statement was issued in English and Russian and posted on the websites of all participating NGOs.

See:
http://www.iphronline.org/uploads/9/0/2/7/9027585/eng_statement_on_international_day_in_support_of_victims_of_torture_26_june_2015.pdf

Joint Press Release: International Day in Support of Victims of Torture 26 June: Detainees in Central Asia frequently subjected to electric shock, suffocation, rape and beatings , 26 June 2015

Central Asian and international human rights groups joined forces to call on governments in the region to honour the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture by pledging to end torture and bring justice to the victims. The action called for concrete steps to be taking including ensuring detainees’ access to a lawyer of their choice promptly after apprehension, setting up independent mechanisms to

See:
<http://notorture.tj/analitics/dvadcat-let-v-borbe-s-pytkami>

investigate torture complaints and – for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – to issue standing invitations to United Nations (UN) Special Procedures including the Special Rapporteur on torture.

Publications in Central Asian media

Project partners worked with the media in their respective countries in order to raise public awareness on torture prevention.

For example, in Tajikistan, an analysis entitled “Twenty Years Fighting Torture” was prepared by a journalist for the International Day for the Defence of Victims of Torture. It was published by Asia Plus and on the website of the Coalition Against Torture. The article was viewed 14,515 times on the Asia-Plus website alone.

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1. A presentation of the work of the three coalitions against torture and an **overview of regional cooperation**;
2. Examination of the **psychological aspects of human rights work** against torture;
3. The **shrinking space for NGOs** in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Previous issues of the newsletter can be found at:

<http://www.iphronline.org/central-asia-coalitions-against-torture-newsletter-20141128.html> ;

<http://www.iphronline.org/central-asia-coalitions-against-torture-newsletter-20141210.html>

and

<http://www.iphronline.org/central-asia-freedom-from-torture-newsletter-20150319.html>

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