

**Open Letter about Threats and Pressure against  
Human Rights NGO in Southern Kyrgyzstan**

**To:** President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbaeva

**Cc:** Minister of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Zarylbek Rysaliev,  
General Prosecutor of Kyrgyzstan Kubatbek Baibolov

*Brussels, 22 October 2010*

Dear Madam President,

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Partnership for Human Rights as we are concerned about the safety of the staff members of the Jalal-Abad based NGO *Spravedlivost* (Justice), who have been subjected to threats and pressure because of their human rights activities. We ask you to ensure that adequate measures are taken to protect the employees of this organization.

*Spravedlivost* is an independent NGO that is well-known and respected for its human rights work both in Kyrgyzstan and abroad. In recent months the organization has actively been monitoring and documenting human rights violations perpetrated during the inter-ethnic violence that broke out in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. The organization has also provided free legal assistance to both ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the aftermath of the inter-ethnic violence of the summer. Lawyers from the organization defend, among others, some of the ethnic Uzbek men charged in relation to events that took place near a cotton-processing plant in the Jalal-Abad region on 13-14 June and resulted in the death of 16 people.

On 12 October, two unknown men who claimed to be relatives of ethnic Kyrgyz who died in these events came to the office of *Spravedlivost* and harassed and intimidated staff members of the organization. The two men asked why the organization is “defending killers” and demanded that the lawyers engaged by it in the case concerning the events near the cotton-processing plant “sit quietly” during the trial and do not ask any questions or submit any petitions to the judge. The two men also requested the full names and contact details of the director and the employees of the organization and threatened to “punish” them if they do not comply with the demands made.<sup>1</sup>

This incident took place in a general climate of insecurity facing human rights defenders and lawyers who are working on cases related to the recent inter-ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. There have been numerous reports about intimidation, harassment and physical attacks against human rights defenders, in particular those engaged in efforts to assist ethnic Uzbeks in the aftermath of the violence.<sup>2</sup> During several trials held in cases of ethnic Uzbeks accused of involvement in the inter-ethnic clashes, members of the audience have shouted nationalist slogans and threats and physically attacked defendants and their lawyers and family members without an adequate response from the side of judges, prosecutors and police officers present.<sup>3</sup>

With reference to a series of recent cases of threats and attacks of this kind, lawyers from *Spravedlivost* and other organizations who provide legal assistance to individuals charged in relation to the inter-ethnic violence of the summer announced on Monday that they refuse to

participate in the trials under way as long as their safety is not adequately protected. On Wednesday 20 October, a meeting between a government delegation commissioned by you, Madam President, and human rights defenders, lawyers, judges, prosecutors and police was held in the city of Jalal-Abad to discuss this issue.

During the meeting, Vice Premier Minister Azimbek Beknazarov acknowledged existing problems with respect to security at trials and ordered local law enforcement authorities to step up the protection of lawyers during legal processes related to the June events. This was an important and welcome step.

However, as reported by individuals who were present at the meeting<sup>4</sup>, representatives of authorities also made statements aimed at reinforcing suspicion and mistrust toward NGOs that are working on cases related to the inter-ethnic clashes. Alima Amanova, who represented the office of the regional ombudsman at the meeting, called for an investigation into how *Spravedlivost* and other NGOs fund their legal assistance and other activities, alleging that these organizations supply foreign donors with information that is false, unsubstantiated or exaggerated to prove that they deserve the grants they receive. In particular, she claimed that NGOs have spread “lies” about violent attacks against people associated with the defense in trials related to the June violence, although such attacks have been well documented also by international organizations.<sup>5</sup> In the ensuing discussion, which was characterized by a generally hostile tone toward NGOs, Beknazarov reportedly suggested that law enforcement authorities examine the activities of NGOs that are working on cases related to the inter-ethnic violence with a view to determining whether they comply with national legislation and whether the existence of these organizations is justified.

We are concerned that statements such as those made at yesterday’s meeting may further fuel negative sentiments toward human rights defenders and lawyers who are engaged in legitimate human rights activities related to the events of the summer and encourage further acts of intimidation and harassment toward them.

In light of the concerns raised in this letter, we urge you to use your powers and influence to:

- Ensure that necessary measures are taken to protect the safety and well-being of the staff members of *Spravedlivost*;
- Ensure that protection is improved generally of human rights defenders and lawyers who are involved in human rights activities related to the inter-ethnic violence of the summer, with a view to guaranteeing that they can carry out their work without intimidation, harassment or undue interference;
- Call on representatives of public authorities to refrain from making statements that may help increase suspicion and mistrust toward human rights defenders and lawyers who carry out legitimate human rights activities and, in the current climate, may contribute to further endangering them;
- Ensure that trials held in cases related to the inter-ethnic violence of the summer, are conducted in a fair and orderly manner, and that adequate measures are implemented in practice to protect the safety of defendants and their lawyers and relatives.

I thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Brigitte Dufour, Director,  
International Partnership for Human Rights  
Brussels, Belgium

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Amnesty International, "Kyrgyzstan: Human rights activists at risk", 13 October 2010, at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/018/2010/en>; "Сотрудникам правозащитной организации из города Джалал-Абада (Кыргызстан) угрожают расправой", 13 October 2010, at <http://24kg.org/investigation/84830-sotrudnikam-pravozashhitnoj-organizacii-iz-goroda.html>

<sup>2</sup> See also joint statement by the International Partnership for Human Rights and six other human rights NGOs about challenges faced by human rights defenders in Central Asia, 30 September 2010, at <http://www.iphronline.org/news.html?34>

<sup>3</sup> See also joint statement by the International Partnership for Human Rights, Citizens against Corruption and Fiery Hearts Club about arbitrary detentions, police brutality, extortion, unfair trials and other unlawful and abusive actions perpetrated in the aftermath of the inter-ethnic violence of the summer in Kyrgyzstan, 1 October 2010, at <http://www.iphronline.org/news.html?36>.

<sup>4</sup> Information received from *Spravedlivost*, 21 October 2010.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Watch, "Kyrgyzstan: Attacks During Trials Undermine Justice," 13 October 2010, at <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/10/13/kyrgyzstan-attacks-during-trials-undermine-justice>