IPHR International Partnership for Human Rights

A Region in Repression: The Growing Assault on Civic Space in Central Asia

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Across Central Asia, civic space is under increasing pressure, and the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are severely restricted. This briefing provides an overview of current alarming trends in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, drawing on documentation by International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and its Central Asian partners. It covers excessive restrictions and stigmatisation of civil society organisations (CSOs); crackdowns on independent media and threats to free speech; violations of the rights of protesters; and persecution of critical voices. It also provides recommendations in these areas.

Excessive restrictions and stigmatisation of CSOs

Across Central Asia, CSOs face excessive and unjustified restrictions, often inspired by Russian legislation and policies, especially those targeting foreign-funded groups. Policymakers advocating such measures have also seized on the debate surrounding the current US presidential administration's moves to dismantle USAID and overhaul US foreign assistance as a justification to intensify hostile rhetoric and propose new restrictive measures. These attacks have come as many CSOs are already struggling to sustain their operations due to the suspension of US-funded initiatives and declining funding opportunities.

In **Kazakhstan**, in February 2025, a member of parliament from a pro-government faction proposed adopting a "foreign agent" law, claiming it is time to "rewrite the rules of the game with foreign donors who disguise political interests as 'media support,' 'human rights,' and 'increasing tolerance.'" [1] The following month, it was confirmed that her faction is drafting such a law. In parallel, separate draft legislation on NGOs is underway.[2] These developments have raised serious concerns about further restrictions targeting NGOs that receive foreign funding, which are already subject to a discriminatory reporting scheme and listed on a stigmatising public registry.[3]

Policymakers have particularly singled out foreign-funded feminist and LGBTI groups, accusing them of undermining national values and promoting so-called "immoral behaviour." [4] These groups are also facing growing harassment. For example, the NGO Feminita has been repeatedly denied registration on dubious grounds, and its leader, **Gulzada Serzhan**, was fined for leading an unregistered organisation.[5] On several occasions, the movement's events have been disrupted by anti- LGBTI activists, and its representatives have repeatedly been detained by police. [6]

It is of further concern that, in March 2025, President Tokayev publicly accused international NGOs of interfering in domestic affairs, promoting "alien" values, and allegedly misusing funds.[7] These accusations – made with reference to the current US administration's stated aim of tackling financial abuses and restoring "traditional" values – also cast suspicion on local groups which cooperate with international partners.[8] In a public address delivered in late April 2025, Tokayev renewed his allegations, accusing "certain supposedly human rights organisations" of using foreign funding to promote a negative image of Kazakhstan and to stage "provocations".[9]

In **Kyrgyzstan**, a Russia-inspired "foreign agent" law was adopted last year, requiring NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in broadly defined "political" activities to register as "foreign representatives". The law imposes excessive state control, with harsh penalties for non-compliance, including suspension or closure. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission concluded that the law violates association rights and warned that its implementation poses a "real risk of stigmatising, silencing and eventually eliminating" foreign-funded NGOs.[10]

The "foreign representative" law has created a climate of fear and self-censorship, forcing some organisations to shut down and others to restrict their activities to avoid being targeted. While only a few CSOs have voluntarily registered as "foreign representatives" so far, there are concerns that pressure will intensify for others to do so, especially amid calls for stricter enforcement of the law.[11]

In a move reinforcing the climate of mistrust, President Japarov has also publicly accused independent media and human rights groups of misusing foreign funds to spread "false" information.[12]

In **Uzbekistan**, CSOs still face severe restrictions on accessing foreign funding. They must obtain Ministry of Justice approval for all foreign grants exceeding USD 2,800—a cumbersome process often leading to refusals or significant delays. CSOs also face a heavy reporting burden. In addition, many independent CSOs, especially human rights groups, are unable to access foreign funding due to difficulties with obtaining state registration – a prerequisite for receiving grants. For example, human rights defender and former political prisoner **Agzam Turgunov's** application to register a new NGO called Human Rights House has been rejected more than a dozen times due to alleged technical mistakes. Meanwhile, a pro-government commentator recently proposed the adoption of a "foreign agent" law, saying it is needed to "control foreign financial flows" and "safeguard information sovereignty."[13] While no policymaker has formally initiated such legislation to date, this suggestion has heightened concerns about potential new restrictions.

In **Tajikistan**, foreign funding regulations are part of a broader arsenal used to put pressure on CSOs, with them being required to report all foreign grants to the government. Hundreds of CSOs have been forced to close in recent years, leading to a sharp decline in the sector, in particular after the mass protests of 2021 and 2022 in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO). CSO leaders in this region have reportedly been summoned and coerced into shutting down their organisations under threat of serious repercussions, while courts have ordered the closure of some organisations based on unfounded and politically-motivated allegations of criminal ties. Authorities have also arbitrarily rejected or delayed applications for the registration of new CSOs, particularly in GBAO. UN

human rights experts have expressed concern about the mass closures and pressure on CSOs, warning that this could lead to a serious deterioration of the human rights situation in the country.[14]

In **Turkmenistan**, national legislation grants authorities extensive powers to control CSOs, which are required to register all foreign-funded projects and regularly report on their implementation to the government. The number of registered CSOs remains low, and no truly independent human rights organisations are registered — a situation criticised by the UN Human Rights Committee.[15] Due to high risks of persecution, most activists collaborating with exile-based human rights and media groups do so clandestinely. **Soltan Achilova**, a journalist with a public profile who cooperates with the Austria-based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, faces ongoing surveillance and intimidation. In November 2024, she was forcibly hospitalised for an alleged infection—preventing her, for the second time, from travelling to Geneva for a human rights award ceremony and speak about her work.[16] Achilova also reported suspected poisoning attempts prior to her hospitalisation, leading the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to express concern for her right to life.[17]

Recommendations

Central Asian authorities should:

- Bring oversight of CSOs in line with their international human rights obligations, including by refraining from enacting legislation that imposes undue control, discrimination, or stigmatisation of foreign-funded CSOs, and repeal or thoroughly revise existing restrictive laws.
- Ensure transparent and fair registration processes for CSOs, protect their right to access funding—including from international sources—and safeguard their ability to operate without undue interference or fear of reprisals.

International partners of Central Asian governments should:

- Publicly and consistently reaffirm their support for civil society in Central Asia amid the unprecedented challenges it faces.
- Increase accessible financial and other practical assistance to Central Asian CSOs to enable them to fulfil their vital roles in promoting human rights, the rule of law, social justice, and equality.

Crackdowns on independent media and free speech

Across Central Asia, independent media, journalists and bloggers are subjected to pressure, and governments restrict free speech in violation of their international obligations.

The media climate in **Kyrgyzstan** has deteriorated significantly due to government raids, blocking of news sites, and prosecution of journalists and bloggers. Last year, the organisation behind the investigative platform Kloop was closed down by court over its allegedly "negative" coverage, while the Kyrgyz RFE/RL service remains under scrutiny despite the reversal of its previous court-ordered closure. Earlier this year, President Japarov backed Trump advisor Elon Musk's call to shut down

RFE/RL[18], accusing the Kyrgyz service of spreading misinformation.[19] Although a subsequent move by the Trump administration to cut funding for RFE/RL was ultimately halted[20], the future of the Kyrgyz and other Central Asian services remains uncertain.

Moreover, in late April 2025, Kyrgyzstani prosecutors filed a petition with a local court seeking the closure of the April TV channel, accusing it of disseminating "negative" information accompanied by "sarcasm," "ridicule", and "expressive speech and facial expressions." They alleged that such coverage presents the government in an "unfavourable light," undermines its authority, and fosters public mistrust and suspicion. The petition has yet to be considered by the court.[21]

A widely-criticised draft media law was significantly revised and improved before being resubmitted to Kyrgyzstan's Parliament, where it was adopted on first reading on 9 April 2025.[22] However, other recent legislative initiatives raise serious free speech concerns. Legislation in force since February 2025 grants police broad discretion to fine those accused of spreading "insulting or knowingly 'false' defamatory information",[23] while a draft law currently under consideration in Parliament proposes yet another vaguely-worded offense related to the online dissemination of "false" information.[24]

In **Kazakhstan**, independent media, journalists, and bloggers face ongoing harassment, ranging from online attacks to criminal prosecution, including on overly broad and imprecise charges of spreading "false" information or "incitement" to hatred. While a new media law adopted in 2024 introduced some improvements, other aspects cause serious concern such as: mandatory registration for both online and offline media; a lack of independent oversight, and vague grounds for suspending or terminating media operations. New accreditation rules also grant authorities broad powers to deny or revoke accreditation for foreign media and journalists, and to bar domestic journalists from covering the work of state bodies.

In **Tajikistan**, authorities continue to heavily interfere with media - tightly controlling broadcast and social media content - and restrict media access to official information. In recent years, several independent news outlets have been closed down, while others are struggling due to government harassment and funding difficulties. Authorities exploit legal avenues to put pressure on independent journalists, who risk politically-motivated prosecution and imprisonment for allegedly "inciting" hatred, spreading "false" information or other vaguely defined charges. In recent years, an increasing number of people have been imprisoned for promoting "extremism" and "terrorism" simply for liking social media posts. In a welcome step, Parliament adopted amendments in April 2025 to exclude criminal liability in such cases.[25] However, concerns remain about the misuse of extremism and terrorism related charges to suppress free expression. Last autumn, the government halted the activities of a state-CSO working group tasked with drafting a new, improved media law, accusing it of failing to pay adequate attention to issues of independence, security, and culture.

In **Turkmenistan**, authorities tightly control the media, using national outlets for state propaganda while restricting access to alternative sources. Despite promises to improve connectivity, internet access remains slow and expensive, with Turkmenistan ranking among the lowest globally for broadband speed.[26] Internet censorship is extensive, with many independent news, social media and other online resources arbitrarily blocked in the country and only accessible via so-called VPNs. At

the same time, the government also campaigns against the use of these internet censorship circumvention tools through blocking measures and intimidation of those who install and use them. Authorities also continue to persecute journalists, bloggers, and other government critics both domestically and abroad, reinforcing a climate of fear.

Contrary to official claims, authorities in **Uzbekistan** increasingly suppress media freedoms, including by shutting down information platforms and prosecuting journalists and bloggers—often on charges of publishing insulting, defamatory, or "false" information. A draft Information Code could result in further restrictions on the media by imposing broad grounds for limiting content and suspending or terminating media activities. In a legal opinion from last year, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and ODIHR concluded that "a number of provisions raise serious concerns, as they do not duly correspond to internationally recognized freedom of expression standards and good practices".[27] Additionally, a law adopted last year allows authorities to designate foreign citizens as "undesirable" and bar them from entry for five years over actions deemed to undermine state sovereignty or discredit the nation's honour or dignity. This law could be used to restrict legitimate free speech of foreign journalists, bloggers and others covering issues which are sensitive to authorities.[28]

Amid renewed efforts to protect so-called traditional values, proposals to ban "LGBTI propaganda" have resurfaced across Central Asia. In **Kazakhstan**, a public petition calling for such a ban led the government to launch a study on the alleged impact of "LGBTI propaganda" on children, and Members of Parliament have recently renewed calls for a ban, raising concerns that restrictive legislation may follow. In **Uzbekistan**, the head of a ruling party ally stated in November 2024 that efforts are under way to draft legislation banning "LGBTI propaganda",[29] echoing the government's past claims that "homosexual propaganda" poses a "serious danger" to society. Uzbekistan and **Turkmenistan** remain the only Central Asian countries where homosexual relations are still criminalised, despite repeated calls by UN bodies for decriminalisation.

Recommendations

Central Asian authorities should:

- Repeal or amend restrictive laws and practices that undermine freedom of expression and media freedom, and safeguard the rights of independent media outlets, journalists, and bloggers to work without interference or fear of reprisals.
- Ensure unhindered access to both online and offline information, and refrain from suppressing the exchange of information and public debate under the pretext of combating disinformation, defamation, societal discord, or threats to national cultural values.
- Refrain from adopting or enforcing bans on so-called "LGBTI propaganda," which are inconsistent with international human rights standards.

International partners of Central Asian governments should:

- Express serious concern about pressure on independent media in Central Asia and excessive restrictions on free speech.

- Raise these issues as matters of urgency in bilateral and multilateral dialogues and call for concrete steps to address them, in line with international human rights obligations.

Violations of the rights of protesters and impunity for serious abuses

There are ongoing concerns about the lack of impartial, thorough, and effective investigations into widespread allegations of excessive force, torture, and other serious violations committed by authorities during the suppression of mass protests and unrest in Kazakhstan, the Republic of Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan, and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) in Tajikistan in 2022. Authorities have consistently rejected calls for international investigations into these tragic events, which resulted in significant loss of life and other casualties. The measures taken to investigate and address violations of protesters' rights have failed to ensure adequate accountability.

More than 40 security and law enforcement officials have been convicted for torture and other abuses committed during the "Bloody January" 2022 events in **Kazakhstan**, when authorities harshly suppressed mass protests for social and political change and evolving unrest.[30] These convictions are welcome, but the number remains low given the scale of violations, with hundreds of complaints about abuse having been filed by detained protesters. Many investigations have been prematurely closed due to an alleged lack of evidence, while cases reaching court have often been marred by fair trial concerns, lenient penalties, and inadequate compensation for victims. For example, in January 2025, six police officers convicted of brutally torturing several dozen people in a detention centre in Almaty region received mere three-year prison sentences, and victims' requests for compensation were only partially granted. Lawyers also raised concerns that the trial began before all the facts had been clarified and all perpetrators had been identified.[31]

In **Uzbekistan**, a parliamentary commission set up to investigate the July 2022 events in Karakalpakstan, under the lead of the Human Rights Commissioner, presented its findings in December 2024.[32] The commission concluded that law enforcement agencies had used internationally recognised methods to disperse protests against proposed constitutional amendments[33], and that the rights of those accused of involvement in the protests were fully protected. However, this contrasts with credible independent reports of the excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions, and torture of protesters. According to the commission, only three law enforcement officials have been held accountable for human rights violations[34], compared to nearly 10,000 protesters convicted for law infringements, with penalties ranging from warnings to imprisonment. The commission's findings highlight the need for further, impartial and thorough investigations into the July 2022 events and for effective measures to hold all perpetrators, including high-ranking officials, accountable for violations.

In **Tajikistan**, no progress has been made to ensure accountability for the serious human rights violations committed by security and law enforcement officials during the suppression of mass protests in the GBAO in May 2022 and – prior to this – in November 2021.[35]

Meanwhile, the right to peaceful assembly continues to be violated across the region. In **Kyrgyzstan**, a prolonged court-sanctioned ban on protests – first initiated in response to a request from the

Russian embassy to end anti-war protests outside its premises in 2022 – remains in place in central Bishkek. Most recently, it was extended until the end of June 2025.[36]

In **Kazakhstan**, authorities routinely deny permission for peaceful protests and arbitrarily detain and penalise protesters before, during, and after gatherings. In **Turkmenistan**, authorities suppress spontaneous expressions of dissent and forcibly mobilise citizens for state-organised events, threatening reprisals for non-participation.

Recommendations

Central Asian authorities should:

- Undertake independent, thorough, and effective investigations into the 2022 suppression of mass protests and all alleged human rights violations, ensuring that those responsible are held accountable through fair trials, given appropriate penalties, and that victims receive adequate compensation.
- Protect the right to peaceful assembly as guaranteed by international human rights standards, refrain from imposing unjustified restrictions, and ensure that peaceful protests can take place without hindrance.

Partners of Central Asian governments should:

- Reiterate calls for independent and transparent investigations into the 2022 crises, ensuring the participation of international experts to guarantee comprehensive accountability.
- Increase support for local human rights defenders and civil society organisations working to monitor and document violations of peaceful assembly rights and to support victims of such violations.

Persecution of critical voices

Throughout Central Asia, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and others who criticise government policies, expose human rights violations, and advocate for justice, face persecution. They are subjected to surveillance, threats, and attacks, and are arrested, convicted and imprisoned after unfair trials because of their exercise of the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. Those prosecuted often face charges initiated under broadly worded Criminal Code provisions used to suppress free speech, such as those related to disseminating "false" or slanderous information, "inciting" hatred, calling for "disobedience" to authorities, or alleged "extremism". Others are charged with fabricated offenses like extortion or fraud.

Those targeted include individuals who have been arrested and prosecuted as part of crackdowns launched by authorities following the 2022 mass protests in Kazakhstan, Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan), and GBAO (Tajikistan) (see above).

There are significant concerns about individuals serving politically-motivated prison sentences under harsh conditions. Forced psychiatric confinement is also sometimes used against outspoken

individuals.[37]

Moreover, repression extends beyond borders, with government critics abroad increasingly targeted through transnational measures and requests for their forcible return. Additionally, intimidation and harassment frequently extend to family members, creating a pervasive climate of fear and silencing dissent in the region.

The cases described below, which are of particular concern to IPHR and partners, illustrate the broader trend of persecution:

In **Kazakhstan**, more than 20 individuals remain imprisoned on charges widely regarded by human rights defenders as politically motivated.[38]

We are deeply concerned about the well-being of the imprisoned leader of the unregistered Alga Kazakhstan! party, **Marat Zhylanbaev**. He is serving a seven-year prison sentence on extremism-related charges, issued in 2023 in retaliation for his peaceful opposition activities. [39] He has reported being subjected to pressure in prison and has repeatedly launched hunger strikes to protest against inhuman and degrading treatment.[40] Several other activists are also currently imprisoned on spurious charges due to their opposition engagement.

Another worrying case is that of satirical blogger **Temirlan Yensebek**, who was sentenced in April 2025 to five years of restricted freedom for allegedly inciting inter-ethnic hatred. These charges concern a social media post in which he shared an offensively worded song, which he did not write and which is widely available and not banned in the country. His case illustrates how vague criminal provisions are misused to stifle free expression and punish critics of the government. [41]

In an example of transnational repression, women's rights activist **Dinara Smailova** (also known as Dina Tansari) was recently detained in Montenegro following an extradition request from Kazakhstani authorities, who have brought multiple criminal charges against her in relation to her work with survivors of domestic and sexual violence. She was released pending the consideration of her asylum application, but her situation remains precarious [42] Both human rights defenders and UN experts have expressed serious concern about the charges against her.[43]

In **Kyrgyzstan**, journalist **Makhabat Tazhibek Kyzy** from the investigative platform Temirov Live – known for exposing corruption – was sentenced in October 2024 to five years in prison on charges of allegedly calling for riots. Her colleague, **Azamat Ishenbekov**, was also imprisoned on similar charges but was pardoned and released in April 2025.[44] Another independent journalist, **Kanyshay Mamyrkulova** – who has criticised the government on social media – was arrested in March 2025. She remains in pre-trial detention on charges of allegedly calling for riots and inciting inter-ethnic discord in relation to the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border issue.[45]

In yet another alarming case, human rights defender **Rita Karasartova** was arrested in April 2025 after sharing an appeal on social media from a persecuted opposition activist (who was later forcibly returned to Kyrgyzstan under unclear circumstances[46]). She is currently in pre-trial detention pending

an investigation in a criminal case related to mass unrest.[47] Investigators have provided no credible justification for the case against her, citing the alleged secrecy of it.[48] There are particular concerns about her well-being in detention as she recently underwent extensive dental surgery. Following a visit to her in detention, Kyrgyzstan's Ombudsperson called for ensuring proper medical care.[49]

The cases of the three women underscore growing concerns about Kyrgyzstani authorities' misuse of vaguely defined criminal charges to target individuals for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.

In Tajikistan, human rights defender **Manuchehr Kholiqnazarov** continues to serve a 16-year prison sentence on extremist related charges issued in 2022 in clear retaliation for his work to promote human rights and justice in the GBAO. In addition to human rights NGOs, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has concluded that he has been unlawfully detained and called for his immediate release.[50] IPHR and partners are seriously concerned about his health and well-being in prison. Kholiqnazarov's case is part of a broader and ongoing crackdown that followed the 2022 GBAO events. As part of this crackdown, several other activists, bloggers, and journalists have also been imprisoned. At least eight independent journalists are currently imprisoned on charges considered retaliatory,[51] including **Abdullo Ghurbati** (who was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison in 2022) and **Daler Bobiev** (who was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2022).

In a recent worrying case, journalist **Rukhshona Khakimova** was sentenced in February 2025 to eight years in prison on treason charges, reportedly linked to her research into China's influence in Tajikistan. When imprisoning her, The Supreme Court failed to consider her personal circumstances, including the fact that she has two young children – one of them a nine-month-old baby. [52]

In **Turkmenistan**, authorities continue to persecute those who criticise the government, assert their rights, and engage with like-minded individuals both inside and outside the country. A particularly troubling case is that of human rights activist **Mansur Mingelov**, who has been imprisoned for over a decade. He was sentenced to 22 years in 2012 on multiple charges after exposing ill-treatment of ethnic Baloch community members. He has suffered serious health problems in prison, believed to be related to beatings he was allegedly subjected to upon his initial detention.[53] Alongside human rights groups, UN experts have condemned his detention and called for his release.[54]

The authorities have also pursued the forcible return of outspoken activists and bloggers based abroad, particularly in Turkey. For example, **Farhat Meimankulyiev** (also known as Farhat Durdyiev) was deported from Turkey to Turkmenistan in 2023[55] and was reportedly sentenced to a lengthy prison term upon return.[56] He had previously faced harassment in Turkey, including by being arbitrarily detained at Turkmenistan's consulate in Istanbul and pressured to apologise for posting regime-critical videos.[57] In late April 2025, **Alisher Sakhatov** and **Abdulla Orusov** - two other bloggers critical of the Turkmenistani authorities - were detained in Turkey and ordered to be deported on the grounds that they allegedly pose a threat to public order and security.[58] At the time of writing, they remain in a deportation centre, with an appeal against their deportation pending. If sent back to Turkmenistan, they face a serious risk of torture and politically motivated imprisonment.

In **Uzbekistan**, lawyer and blogger **Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov** is serving a 16-year sentence on a series of charges initiated in retaliation for his peaceful participation in the 2022 mass protests in Karakalpakstan. His lawyer recently reported new allegations of physical and other ill-treatment in prison[59], heightening concerns about his health and well-being. Human rights defenders and international experts have raised serious concerns about his case, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has deemed his detention unlawful, calling for his immediate release.[60]

Following the 2022 events, Uzbekistani authorities have also targeted Karakalpak activists abroad in retaliation for their peaceful activism. One such activist, **Rinat Utambetov**, was extradited from Kazakhstan in December 2024 after withdrawing his asylum request and was subsequently reported to have been sentenced to two years in prison for encroaching on the constitutional order and disseminating materials threatening public security. [61]

Bloggers in Uzbekistan are also increasingly targeted over social media posts on sensitive issues. In one case of great concern, 62-year-old blogger **Shahida Salomova** was arrested for defamation after criticising polygamy in a post referencing a relative of the president. She has been confined to psychiatric hospitals since 2023, reportedly medicated against her will and cut off from the outside world. Her health conditions — including diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure — have reportedly worsened in detention.[62]

Many other cases involving activists, defenders and journalists are also of great concern to IPHR and partners – additional examples can be found in our recent briefings and updates (see the list in the next section).

Recommendations

Central Asian authorities should:

- Stop intimidating and harassing civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, and others who criticise the authorities, using the tactics outlined above.
- Drop charges and release individuals prosecuted in retaliation for peacefully and legitimately exercising their fundamental freedoms, including those described above.
- Ensure that imprisoned activists are treated in accordance with international standards and protected from abuse while in detention.
- Revise broadly worded provisions in the Criminal Code that suppress free speech, such as those related to disseminating "false" or slanderous information, "inciting" hatred, calling for "disobedience" to authorities, and involvement in "extremism."

International partners of Central Asian authorities should:

- Use every opportunity to express concern over the persecution of activists, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, and other government critics in Central Asia.
- Raise individual cases of concern, including those described above, through both public and private channels, insisting on justice for those affected.
- Press for a revision of legislation that is misused to suppress criticism of those in power, in line with recommendations made by international experts.

Additional information

Additional information about the issues outlined above can be found in the following country briefings and updates prepared by IPHR and partners:

Briefing on Kazakhstan, prepared by IPHR and Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR) for EU Human Rights Dialogue, February 2025: *https://iphronline.org/articles/threats-to-civic-space-in-kazakhstan-briefing-ahead-of-eu-dialogue/*
Briefing on Kyrgyzstan, prepared by IPHR for EU engagement, February 2025: *https://iphronline.org/articles/eu-ensuring-a-value-based-partnership-with-kyrgyzstan-civic-space-briefing/*
Update on Tajikistan, prepared by IPHR as part of cooperation with the CIVICUS Monitor, February 2025: *https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistans-crackdown-on-dissent-erosion-of-rights-and-civic-space/*
Update on Turkmenistan, prepared by IPHR and Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR) as part of cooperation with the CIVICUS Monitor, November 2024: *https://iphronline.org/articles/turkmenistan-economic-hardship-repression-and-targeting-of-critics-at-home-and-abroad/*
Update on Uzbekistan, prepared by IPHR and Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA) as part of cooperation with the CIVICUS Monitor, October 2024: *https://iphronline.org/articles/uzbekistan-pressure-on-critical-voices-continues/*

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[1] https://www.zakon.kz/obshestvo/6466831-vvesti-v-kazakhstane-zakon-ob-inostrannykh-agentakh-predlozhili-deputaty.html, https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/deputat-predlojila-prinyat-v-kazahstane-zakon-ob-inoagentah-562299/
[2] https://orda.kz/zakon-ob-inoagentah-razrabatyvajut-deputaty-parlamenta-399413/
[3] The registry is available at: https://kgd.gov.kz/ru/content/reestr-lic-poluchayushchih-dengi-i-ili-inoe-imushchestvo-ot-inostrannyh-gosudarstv?utm_source=in_materials
[4] https://orda.kz/detej-uchat-byt-gomoseksualistami-i-lesbijankami-v-kazahstane-ozabotilis-lgbt-propagandoj-399948, https://orda.kz/feministki-lgbt-i-jemo-razlagajut-obschestvo-schitajut-v-mazhilise-399954/
[5] https://ulysmedia.kz/news/46867-osnovatelnitsa-feminity-gulzada-serzhan-oshtrafovana-v-almaty/
[6] The most recent incidents took place in February and March 2025, see more in the following updates by KIBHR and the Times of Central Asia: https://bureau.kz/publ-all/sobstvennaya_informaciya/v-almaty-snova-sorvali/, https://timesca.com/feminists-in-kazakhstan-under-pressure-ahead-of-international-womens-day/
[7] See more in Vlast article from 14 March 2025: https://vlast.kz/novosti/64285-tokaev-zaavil-cto-mezdunarodnye-npo-desatiletiami-vmesivalis-vo-vnutrennie-dela-stran.html
[8] See more in Eurasianet article from 7 June 2024: https://eurasianet.org/russian-and-kazakh-legislators-set-up-information-exchange-to-study-foreign-influence
[9] https://vlast.kz/novosti/64808-tokaev-obvinil-otdelnyh-pravozasitnikov-i-zurnalistov-v-provokaciah.html?utm_source=popular_pages&utm_medium=novosti
[10] The opinion is available at: https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2024)033-e
[11] The MP who first initiated the law, made such a call in January 2025: https://24.kg/vlast/316948/
[12] See media report on his speech from 21 December 2024: https://www.vb.kg/doc/441652_sadyr_japarov:_smi_zaiavliaushie_o_nehvatke_svobody_sami_ee_lisheny.html
[13] https://politik.uz/novosti/zakon-ob-inoagentah-nuzhen-v-uzbekistane-bahtiyor-ergashev
[14] See joint letter by UN Special Rapporteurs sent to the government in February 2024: https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28770
[15] See concluding observations issued by the Human Rights Committee in April 2023: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en
[16] See more in TIHR-IPHR statement from November 2024: https://iphronline.org/articles/turkmenistan-elderly-journalist-prevented-from-travelling-to-geneva-forcibly-hospitalized/
[17] See statement issued on 3 April 2025: https://srdefenders.org/un-expert-urges-turkmenistan-to-investigate-alleged-poisoning-attempts-on-gurbansoltan-achilova-harassment-must-end-press-release/

[18] Elon Musk supported this idea in a February 2025 post on X: https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1888574212316582230
[19] See more in Central Asia Times article from 14 February 2025: https://timesca.com/japarov-backs-elon-musks-call-to-shut-down-radio-liberty/
[20] https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/radio-free-europe-sees-us-funding-restored-for-the-time-being/
[21] https://kloop.kg/blog/2025/04/24/prokuratura-i-gknb-podali-v-sud-na-aprel-tv-za-nasmeshki-sarkazm-i-mimiku-vedushhih/
[22] The draft law and update about its status are available at Parliament's website: *https://kenesh.kg/bills/661454*
[23] These amendments to the Code of Offenses were signed by President Japarov on 31 January 2025 and entered into force 10 days later. They are available at: https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/4-5478/edition/25920/ru
[24] The draft law proposes penalising the dissemination of false information via mass media or online platforms, including social networks, in a manner that disrupts public order or infringes on the rights and legally protected interests of individuals, organizations, or the state. It was passed on first reading on 10 April 2025. The text of the proposed changes is available at: https://kenesh.kg/bills/663774
[25] See Asia Plus article from 12 April 2025: https://www.facebook.com/asiaplustj/posts/pfbid0fLQqH79gtuR9Dhk8pnPjy5ZgZRzmLCRnpQNvvATpDWEVnZK9qvc2UwjuTQCVYxfcl
[26] For example, in January 2025, Turkmenistan ranked third last in the Speedtext Global Index, with only Cuba and Syria behind: https://www.speedtest.net/global-index
[27] See legal analysis prepared by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, May 2024, https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024-05-29%20-%20ODIHR-RFoM%20Joint%20Opinion_%20Draft%20Information%20Code_%20Uzbekistan.pdf
[28] See more in joint statement issued by more than 30 NGOs in July 2024: https://iphronline.org/articles/uzbekistan-international-human-rights-organisations-call-on-president-mirziyoyev-to-veto-undesirable-foreigners-law/
[29] https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/uzbekistan-developing-bill-to-ban-lgbt-propaganda/
[30] For more background about these events, and the human rights violations committed see IPHR-KIBHR update from March 2022: https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-widespread-violations-reported-during-bloody-january/, and joint report issued by IPHR, KIBHR, Kazakhstan's NGO Coalition against Torture and OMCT in January 2023: https://iphronline.org/articles/we-don-t-even-cry-anymore/
[31] See more in Radio Azattyk article from 17 January 2025: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/v-kazahstane-politseyskih-osudili-na-3-goda-za-primenenii-v-yanvare-2022-go-pytok-k-zaderzhannym-v-chisle-kotoryh---muzykant-iz-kr-ruzahunov/33279291.html
[32] https://parliament.gov.uz/news/nukus-voqealari-boyicha-tuzilgan-komissiya-axboroti-oliy-majlisga-taqdim-etildi
[33] For more background on these events, see joint statement by IPHR, AHRCA and OMCT from July 2022: https://iphronline.org/articles/uzbekistan-karakalpakstan/
[34] According to media reports, in August 2023, three law enforcement officials were convicted in relation to the July 2022 events in Karakalpakstan. Two of them were sentenced to seven years in prison for torture, while the third one was given a three-year sentence for failure to render aid, leading to death. See: Radio Ozodi report from 8 August 2023: https://rus.ozodi.org/a/32538641.html
[35] For more background on these events, see IPHR update from September 2022: https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistan-civicus-2021-2022/
[36] https://kaktus.media/doc/520545_v_bishkeke_snova_prodlili_zapret_na_provedenie_mitingov_v_centre.html
[37] For two recent examples in Uzbekistan, see joint appeal by AHRCA, IPHR and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee from 11 March 2025: https://iphronline.org/articles/joint-appeal-to-french-president-macron-raise-pressing-human-rights-concerns-during-uzbek-president-mirziyoyevs-visit/
[38] For a list of these prisoners, see https://tirek.info/lists/wpbdp_category/list01/
[39] See IPHR-KIBHR statement from 1 December 2023: https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-harsh-sentence-for-opposition-party-leader-shows-lack-of-real-political-modernisation/
[40] Most recently, he launched a hunger strike in March 2025 to protest against being held in degrading detention conditions and being denied the right to work, run — which is especially important to him as a former world-renowned marathon runner — and draw. See more in Respublika article from 17 April 2025: https://respublika.kz.media/archives/144112
[41] See more in IPHR statement from January 2025: https://iphronline.org/articles/kazakhstan-seven-years-in-prison-for-sharing-an-offensive-song/
[42] See more in the following articles: https://rus.azattyq.org/a/sud-v-chernogorii-otkazalsya-ekstradirovat-dinu-tansari/33385713.html, https://vlast.kz/novosti/64696-dina-tansari-soobsila-cto-sud-po-ee-ekstradicii-v-kazahstan-ese-predstoit.html
[43] See joint communication by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and other UN experts from 18 March 2024: https://srdefenders.org/kazakhstan-criminal-charges-against-and-placement-on-an-international-wanted-list-of-whrd-dinara-smailova-joint-communication/
[44] https://kloop.kg/blog/2025/04/09/aktivistku-torokulovu-i-akyna-ishenbekova-pomilovali-ukazom-zhaparova/
[45] See statement by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and IPHR: https://iphronline.org/articles/kyrgyzstan-release-journalist-kanyshay-mamyrkulova-and-drop-retaliatory-charges/
[46] On 10 April 2025, opposition activist Tilekmat Kurenov was reported missing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he had been stranded since November 2024 due to pending extradition requests from Kyrgyzstani authorities. On 19 April, Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security announced that he had been detained in the UAE and forcibly returned to Kyrgyzstan in connection with alleged crimes related to his social media activity. The legal basis for his return remains unclear, and his whereabouts between 10 and 19 April are unknown. On 21 April, a local court in Bishkek sanctioned Kurenov's pre-trial detention

until 19 May on charges of attempting to seize power by force. See more in the following media reports: https://kloop.kg/blog/2025/04/19/siloviki-dostavili-tilekmata-kurenova-v-kyrgyzstan/, https://kaktus.media/doc/522277_zaderjannomy_tilekmaty_kyrenovy_opredelili_mery_presecheniia.html

[47] A local court sanctioned her pre-trial detention on these charges until 12 May 2025. See: *https://rus.azattyk.org/a/33387998.html*

[48] See more at: https://media.kg/news/pravozashhitnicza-gulshajyr-abdirasulova-rasskazala-kak-sledovatel-po-delu-rity-karasartovoj-ssylaetsya-na-tajnu-sledstviya-chtoby-ne-obyasnyat-prichiny-zaderzhaniya/

[49] See statement from 22 April 2025: https://ombudsman.kg/ru/publications/institut-provel-monitoring-v-sizo-1-na-soblyudenie-prav-arestovannyh-na-ohranu-zdorovya

[50] The opinion is available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session99/a-hrc-wgad-2024-19-tajikistan-aev.pdf

[51] For a list of imprisoned journalists, see the following overview by Committee to Protect Journalists: https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2024/?status=Imprisoned&cc_fips%5B%5D=TI&start_year=2024&end_year=2024&group_by=location

[52] See more in Tajikistan update from February 2025: https://iphronline.org/articles/tajikistans-crackdown-on-dissent-erosion-of-rights-and-civic-space/

[53] See more in post by Turkmen News from June 2024: https://turkmen.news/mansura-mingelova-vozvrashayut-iz-bolnicy-v-koloniyu-iz-za-otkaza-ot-amputacii-nogi/, and October 2021: https://turkmen.news/banner/mingelov-prison-health/

[54] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/08/experts-committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-commend-turkmenistans-cooperation, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en

[55] For more information, see the following reports by TIHR and Turkmen Helsinki Foundation: https://www.hronikatm.com/2023/05/fargat-durdyev-detained/; https://www.tmhelsinki.org/article/a6177b10-6aec-4f43-9975-11a07619d1f4

[56] Report from the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation from 3 August 2023: https://www.tmhelsinki.org/article/df999951-7b5e-41e7-8962-f1944de92a44

[57] For more details, see IPHR-TIHR update from October 2021: https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html

[58] See more about their case in posts by Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights*:* https://www.hronikatm.com/2025/04/turkmenskim-grazhdanskim-aktivistam-grozit-deportacziya-na-rodinu/, *and Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights:* https://tmhelsinki.org/ru/article/6b6e02df-feab-40f7-bd77-39147c511b5a

[59] https://tmhelsinki.org/ru/article/e308f15f-7f11-4170-93ec-ec4a748e593d

[60] Opinion adopted in November 2024: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session101/a-hrc-wgad-62-2024-uzbekistan-advance-edite.pdf

[61] See update from Turkmenistani Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights from 18 April 2025: https://tmhelsinki.org/ru/article/e648d288-1eb6-4853-bf34-1e5e0eafe8e4

[62] See more in joint appeal by the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, IPHR and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: https://iphronline.org/articles/joint-appeal-to-french-president-macron-raise-pressing-human-rights-concerns-during-uzbek-president-mirziyoyevs-visit/