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Kozlov Conviction in Kazakhstan a Miscarriage of Justice

Washington

Freedom House strongly condemns the conviction of Kazakhstani opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov. Mr. Kozlov was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for inciting social hatred, calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order of the state, and creating an organized criminal group. The charges were brought following the authorities' violent suppression of riots in the western town of Zhanaozen in December 2011.

Freedom House monitored the trial from its beginning on August 16 [Read monitoring reports [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)]. The trial was marred by glaring procedural violations and fundamental legal issues that violated the right to a fair trial of Mr. Kozlov and his co-defendants Akzhanat Aminov and Serik Sapargali. Mr. Aminov and Mr. Sapargali received conditional sentences of five and three years, respectively. The charge of inciting social discord rested on classifying "the authorities" as a social group against which the defendants incited hatred. Furthermore, although the defendants were charged with participating in an organized criminal group led by exiled oligarch Muktar Ablyazov, Mr. Ablyazov was not charged with a crime, and the defense's request for him to appear as a witness via Skype was denied.

"Kozlov's conviction criminalizes legitimate political activity," said Susan Corke, Freedom House's director for Eurasia programs. "His crime was to encourage workers to demand their legitimate, fundamental rights through political activity."

Freedom House is deeply concerned that the central charge of the prosecution, participation in an organized criminal group led by Mr. Ablyazov, will serve as a pretext for cracking down on other members of the opposition, as well as members of independent civil society.

"This conviction should serve to remind everyone that Kazakhstan remains a one-party state that brooks no genuine dissent," Corke said. "For all the government's talk of democratic reform, engaging in politics is punishable by law in Kazakhstan."

Kazakhstan is rated Not Free in *Freedom of the World 2012*, Freedom House's annual survey of fundamental freedoms, Not Free in *Freedom of the Press 2012*, where it ranked 175th out of 197 countries, and Partly Free in *Freedom on the Net 2012*.

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