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Kazakhstan: HRF Calls on President Nazarbayev to Stop Crackdown on Independent Media



Source: AP

NEW YORK (JULY 31, 2013)—The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) calls once again on Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev to stop the government crackdown on independent media outlets in the country. The request is based on a [legal report](#) that HRF released today on the case of a group of independent media outlets banned by the government following their critical coverage of a 2011 labor strike in the town of Zhanaozen, where police killed at least 15 protesters and injured more than 100.

“The country’s abysmal human rights record hit a new low earlier this year, when a court upheld the conviction of opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov,” said HRF President Thor Halvorssen. “Kozlov merely expressed solidarity with the workers at Zhanaozen, and he was subsequently convicted in a show trial. His conviction, along with the persecution of media outlets that were simply informing the public, clearly demonstrates the authoritarian nature of the Nazarbayev regime. The government has denied Kazakhs their right to information, free press, and free speech, all by using the appalling events in Zhanaozen as an excuse,” concluded Halvorssen.

On December 14, 2012, HRF [submitted a letter](#) to President Nazarbayev requesting both Kozlov’s liberation and an end to the media crackdown. HRF’s petition joins the outcry raised by other human rights groups and the European Parliament, which issued a [resolution](#) that strongly criticized the ban of key independent media actors in the country and called on the government to respect OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) standards on freedom of expression. As of the date of this release, the

kazaknstanı government nas not responded to these petitions.

HRF's [legal report](#) finds that media outlets *K-plyus*, *Stan TV*, *Respublika*, and *Vzglyad* were charged with the crimes of extremism in the form of incitement to social discord and propaganda of violent government take-over, breach of prohibition for activities aimed at incitement to social discord in the form of national threats, and the distribution of materials undermining national security, among other charges. The court decisions that banned these media outlets were based on the prior ruling on the case of Kozlov.

International law states that any prohibition of speech that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence must comply with a three-prong test: restrictions must be provided by law, narrowly defined to serve a legitimate interest, and necessary in a democratic society to protect that interest. "In this case, the government of Kazakhstan has failed to demonstrate that the anti-incitement legal provisions used to prosecute and shut down numerous media outlets satisfy this stringent test," said Javier El-Hage, HRF's international legal director.

The increasing crackdown on free media in Kazakhstan, coupled with the regime's continued oppression of dissent, directly opposes [President Nazarbayev's claims](#) that the country is moving forward toward democracy. The banning of these independent media outlets in response to their coverage of state-sponsored violence represents a troubling trend for freedom of expression in Kazakhstan. Recently, the autocratic ruler of the Asian nation—who has been in power for more than two decades—[responded to criticisms](#), stating that no one had the right to lecture his country on its human rights record.

HRF is a nonprofit nonpartisan organization that protects and promotes human rights globally, with an expertise in the Americas. We believe that all human beings are entitled to freedom of self-determination, freedom from tyranny, the right to speak freely, to associate with those of like mind, and to leave and enter their countries. Individuals in a free society must be accorded equal treatment and due process under law, and must have the opportunity to participate in the governments of their countries; HRF's ideals likewise find expression in the conviction that all human beings have the right to be free from arbitrary detainment or exile and from interference and coercion in matters of conscience. HRF does not support nor condone violence. HRF's International Council includes human rights advocates George Ayittey, Vladimir Bukovsky, Palden Gyatso, Garry Kasparov, Mutabar Tadjibaeva, Ramón J. Velásquez, Elie Wiesel, and Harry Wu.

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- Read the full legal report [here](#).