

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

8 October 2020 AI Index Number: **EUR 58/3197/2020**

Amnesty International urges respect for human rights in Kyrgyzstan

Amnesty International is calling on all sides in Kyrgyzstan to respect human rights. In particular, peaceful protesters should not be subjected to violence at the hands of law enforcement officers or non-state actors, journalists should be able to carry out their profession without fear of attack, and the emergency health services should be able to work without interference.

On 5 October, following parliamentary elections on 4 October, large numbers of mostly peaceful demonstrators took to the streets in Bishkek and later Talas, Naryn and Osh to protest against what they viewed as rigged elections. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, but clashes broke out when police officers attempted to disperse the crowds using water cannons, rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades. One protester died (the exact cause of death is not clear), and the Ministry of Health reported in a press release that hospitals had treated 686 people for their injuries.¹

Several journalists were also injured. By 6 October, the Committee to Protect Journalists had recorded six incidents of attacks and interference in the work of journalists. On 4 October, two unidentified men attacked a film crew of the independent news website *Kloop* in the southern city of Osh. They were reportedly filming at a polling station when an unidentified man tried to take the phone with which they were filming. On 5 October, Aibol Kozhomuratov, a reporter for *Current Time*, appeared to be deliberately targeted by police special forces who fired a rubber bullet directly at him. The scene was caught on camera by a reporter from the *Kloop* news website. On 6 October, a law enforcement officer confiscated the phone of Ruslan Kharizov, a correspondent from independent news website *24.kg*, while he was conducting a live broadcast in downtown Bishkek.²

On 8 October, the Minister of Health expressed concern that there had been a number of attacks on emergency health services during the demonstration, and that ambulances had been seized by demonstrators. He also expressed concern that measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were not being observed and warned that cases of the disease were rising.

During the night of 5 – 6 October, groups of protesters seized the parliament building and the main television station and it appears that shortly after that the police withdrew from the streets in the city. The Prime Minister, Speaker of Parliament and several other officials subsequently resigned, while President Sooronbay Jeenbekov has remained in his post despite calls for his resignation or impeachment. Since 6 October, various groups, including at least two self-proclaimed Coordination Committees, have declared that they were in control. To supplement the work of law enforcement officers, Voluntary Citizens' Patrols (DND - Dobrovolnye Narodnye Druzhiny) have been set up. Many of these volunteers are concerned individuals who were very active in helping out during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan in July and August.

¹ https://24.kg/obschestvo/167895_besporjadki_vbishkeke_vbolnitsyi_obratilos_686_postradavshih/

² <https://cpj.org/2020/10/journalists-attacked-obstructed-during-and-after-parliamentary-elections-in-kyrgyzstan/>

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan must uphold the rights of all to protest peacefully and must ensure law enforcement officers respect and protect the right to life, liberty and security of person by complying fully with international standards as set out in the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. The authorities have an obligation to ensure that law enforcement officials are adequately trained, and that a robust system of accountability for any violations committed by them is in place. Non-state groups must not abuse human rights. As soon as is feasibly possible all allegations of illegal use of force by law enforcement officers and of violence by non-state actors must be investigated.

BACKGROUND

The results of the 4 October election in Kyrgyzstan were contested by many within the country resulting in widespread protest, and on 6 October the head of the Central Electoral Commission announced that she had annulled the results. Over the years, police in Kyrgyzstan have been criticised by human rights monitors on occasions for heavy-handed response to peaceful or overwhelmingly peaceful assemblies. Law enforcement must only use force where it is strictly necessary and proportionate to do so, and must only ever use the minimum amount of force necessary to achieve their objective. Water cannon and teargas are only suitable for use in response to widespread violence and must never be used to disperse peaceful protests. Rubber bullets should never be used never for dispersal and only ever aimed at individuals engaged in violence against another person.

During the night of 5 October, groups of demonstrators seized the “White House” which serves as the parliament building as well as the President’s office. The demonstrators also freed a number of prisoners including Almazbek Atambayev, the former President of Kyrgyzstan, who was sentenced to 11 years and two months in prison on corruption charges in June.

Kyrgyzstan was hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in July and August when the under-funded health care system struggled to cope with the number of cases. The number of Corona-virus cases diagnosed per day is currently rising again and reached 245 on 8 October up from 53 cases on 13 September.³

³ <https://kaktus.media/?table=38735&page=1>