

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Amnesty International calls on the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to lift the blanket ban on all peaceful assemblies**

The dispersal of a peaceful march to celebrate International Women's Day in Bishkek yesterday showed a complete lack of respect for Freedom of Assembly and Expression by the Kyrgyzstani authorities.

Any decision to disperse a peaceful assembly should be taken only as a last resort, however, shortly after the march participants had gathered in Victory Square in Bishkek on 8 March to prepare banners they were attacked by men who had concealed their faces with scarves, some armed with batons. Police officers arrived shortly after the attackers, dispersed the peaceful gathering and arrested dozens of the march participants, most of them women. Only three of the masked men were detained. The march participants, were released after police had noted down their details.

On 4 March, the Pervomaisky district court in Bishkek upheld a decision by the city council to ban the march on the grounds that measures needed to be taken to prevent the spread of Corona virus. However, the decision does not appear to provide sufficiently specific justification aimed at preventing disease or injury as the court decision also stated generally that "peaceful demonstrations disturb the stable functioning of everyday life of the capital". The court decision goes further and bans all peaceful assemblies in Bishkek until 1 July 2020.

International human rights standards allow states to limit freedom of assembly, if they are provided by law, and necessary to protect certain specified legitimate aims, one of which is public health. However, states should ensure that measures are not discriminatory and must be proportionate to the negative effect on human rights that follows. Amnesty International is concerned that the motivation for the blanket ban is not sufficiently justified or explained.

The blanket ban on peaceful assemblies by the court in Bishkek appears to be politically motivated. It takes advantage of the global situation to play into the hands of opponents of women's rights in Kyrgyzstan. Another indicator for the authorities' real intentions is that in court on 4 March police officers opposed the 8 March event on the basis that in 2019 some participants had carried banners stating: "I am trans and proud of it".

The Kyrgyzstan authorities must live up to their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and lift the blanket ban.

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