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## **Kazakhstan: No accountability for entrenched torture**

Amnesty International accused the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, of pulling the wool over the eyes of the international community in his government's promise to eradicate torture and fully investigate the lethal force by police.

In a report published today, Amnesty International exposes how the security forces act with impunity and how torture in detention centres is rife.

The report, [\*Old habits: The routine use of torture and other ill-treatment in Kazakhstan\*](#), details how at least 15 people were killed and more than 100 seriously injured when security forces used excessive and lethal force to disperse the crowds in protests in Zhanaozen in December 2011. Scores of people were rounded up by security forces and tortured in overcrowded underground police cells.

Amnesty International is calling on the President to authorize and facilitate an independent international investigation into the use of lethal force by security forces in Zhanaozen in December 2011, as recommended by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay.

“Security forces in Kazakhstan injured and killed people when dispersing demonstrations in Zhanaozen, they tortured the detained and put them in prisons where conditions amount to ill-treatment while the authorities endorsed impunity by failing to investigate such violations in blatant disregard of their obligations,” said Nicola Duckworth, Senior Director of Research at Amnesty International.

“Despite the authorities' continued assertions that they have conducted thorough and impartial investigations, 17 months on from the violence in Zhanaozen justice has not been delivered for the use of excessive and lethal force, for the arbitrary detention, and the torture and other ill-treatment resulting in unfair trials for scores of people,” said Nicola Duckworth.

As a result of a criminal investigation in 2012 only five senior security officers were charged with and sentenced to prison for the abuse of office in relation to the use of force in Zhanaozen. However, no charges were brought against many other security officers some who publicly admitted that they had shot at protesters.

Eyewitnesses claimed that the detainees were kept incommunicado in overcrowded cells, that they had been stripped naked, beaten, kicked and doused with cold water. At least one man died as a result of the torture. However, the monitoring by those who were allowed access could not be conducted in an independent and thorough manner.

During her trial in 2012, Roza Tuletaeva, a labour activist who was charged with being one of the organizers of the December 2011 violence, stated that security officers suspended her by her hair, put a plastic bag over her head to suffocate her and subjected her to sexual humiliation. Security officers threatened to harm her 14-year-old daughter. She was sentenced to five years in prison for “inciting social discord”.

The authorities continue to dismiss allegations of torture as unfounded, including those made under oath in court by individuals detained in the aftermath of the Zhanaozen violence.

In a travesty of justice, the same team of prosecutors who had investigated the violence and ordered the detentions were appointed to investigate the allegations of torture.

Bazarbai Kenzhebaev died on 21 December 2011 two days after he was released from police custody. He told his family and a journalist from Russia he had been tortured in the Zhanaozen main police station after being detained following the violence on 16 December. The then acting head of the police detention center, Zhenishbek Temirov, was the only person charged and sentenced in this case. No real attempt to identify and bring to justice other security officers who have tortured Bazarbai Kenzhebaev was made.

“Not only torture and other ill-treatment is entrenched, going beyond physical assaults by security officers. As well, prison conditions are cruel, inhumane and degrading: inmates are kept in degrading conditions and punished with prolonged periods of solitary confinement in violation of international standards,” said Nicola Duckworth.

Aron Atabek, a 60-year-old dissident writer and poet was detained in 2006 and convicted on charges of taking part in mass disorder and for killing a police officer. He has spent two years and a half in solitary confinement so far, in very harsh, unhealthy conditions. In November 2012, he was sentenced to another two years’ solitary confinement in a high security prison in Arqalyk 1,650km away from his home town.

In 2010 the Kazakhstani authorities declared to the UN that they “would not rest until all vestiges of torture had been fully and totally eliminated”.

In a regressive move in 2011, President Nursultan Nazarbaev transferred control of the entire prison system from the Ministry of Justice back to the Ministry of Internal Affairs against which most of the allegations of torture were received.

“It is clear that the government’s assertions of its commitment to eradicate torture are for international consumption only, that they are an attempt to pull wool over the eyes of the public at home and abroad, while torture and other ill-treatment continue unabated and unchecked,” Nicola Duckworth.

“The promises of the government of President Nazarbaev to the UN will ring hollow until he allows for a fully independent international investigation to accomplish what the Kazakhstani authorities failed to do for more than a year. Without such an investigation the security forces will continue to act with impunity.”