

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Kyrgyzstan: Amnesty International welcomes the lifting of a ban on peaceful assemblies but calls for investigation and redress**

On 10 March, an international women's day march that was due to take place in Bishkek on 8 March finally went ahead without incident. As the march started, the head of the Pervomaisky police station in Bishkek promised that the action would be allowed and that the participants would be protected. He also announced that the ban on peaceful gatherings had been lifted.

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, and banned all peaceful assemblies in Bishkek until 1 July 2020. While appreciating the concerns of the Kyrgyzstani authorities around COVID-19 and the necessity to protect and safeguard people's health we remain concerned that this decision could be politically motivated and plays into the hands of opponents of women's rights in Kyrgyzstan. The decision also stated that "peaceful demonstrations disturb the stable functioning of everyday life of the capital".

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.

As 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.

Aizhan Kadralieva went straight to the police station on 8 March: "We spent three and half hours in front of the police station waiting for the participants of the march to be released. The police officers didn't allow the lawyers to enter to the building. I just felt unsafe - because I thought if anyone can be attacked like that, and the police side with the attackers, nobody is safe."

Amnesty International supports the march participants in calling for an investigation into the actions of police officers on 8 March, in particular, the failure of police officers to protect peaceful protestors from violent attackers and their detention of peaceful protestors. The authorities should also offer redress to those peaceful protestors who were arbitrarily detained and deprived of their right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression. In addition, the violent attackers should be identified and brought before a court.

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