

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS

On 16 January, police raided the homes of 11 journalists known for their past and current involvement with “Ayt Ayt Dese” and “Temirov LIVE”, two independent media projects that have investigated allegations of corruption in Kyrgyzstan. They include Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy, the head of “Temirov LIVE” and Aike Beishekeeva, a 23-year-old factchecker. All 11 were detained for questioning as part of a criminal investigation into alleged “calls for active disobedience [...] and for mass riots, as well as calls for violence against citizens” stemming from a video published on social media. They are now formally charged, placed in pre-trial detention and face up to 10 years in prison. Between 12 March and 9 April, six of the journalists were moved from pre-trial detention to house arrest and one was released under supervision, but charges against them were not dropped. Makhabat and Aike and two other journalists remain in custody.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Sadyr Japarov
President of Kyrgyzstan
Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic
207 Abdumomunov Street
720003, Bishkek
Kyrgyz Republic

Dear Mr President,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the arbitrary detention and criminal prosecution of Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy, Aike Beishekeeva, and nine other journalists and media workers associated with “Ayt Ayt Dese” and Temirov LIVE projects.

They are facing the criminal charges of “calling for active disobedience and mass riots, as well as calls for violence against citizens” based on a video published on social media. The journalists deny the charges. I am concerned that the charges have been brought to punish the journalists for their criticism of the authorities, in violation of the right to freedom of expression.

I am also deeply concerned about allegations that Mahabat was tortured or otherwise ill-treated in the pre-trial detention centre on 5 April. The Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan confirmed that prison guards beat her in her cell leaving her with bruises on her upper body,

I urge you to:

Do everything within your power to immediately release and drop all charges against Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy, Aike Beishekeeva, and nine other journalists of “Temirov LIVE” and “Ayt Ayt Dese” media and enable them to continue their professional activities in Kyrgyzstan freely and without fear. Pending the release of Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Aike Beishekeeva, ensure they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 16 January, during a heavy-handed police operation, 11 journalists and media workers associated with the “Ayt Ayt Dese” and Temirov Live projects, were detained for questioning and taken to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They were denied access to a lawyer while in police custody, and on 30 January all 11 were transferred to the pretrial detention centre SIZO 1 in Bishkek.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the mass searches and detentions were part of a criminal investigation into alleged “calls for active disobedience [...] and for mass riots, as well as calls for violence against citizens” (Article 278(3) of the Criminal Code) stemming from the linguistic examination of a video published on “Ayt Ayt Dese” Youtube channel on 13 December 2023. All 11 have now been charged, which they maintain is a politically motivated move to punish them for their criticism of the authorities.

Among those targeted are two women: Mahabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Aike Beishekeeva. Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy is the head of the media-channel “Temirov LIVE” and its side project “Ayt Ayt Dese”, and wife of Bolot Temirov, the exiled investigative journalist and founder of Temirov LIVE. In addition to the charges mentioned above, Makhabat has also been charged with “organizing mass riots” and faces up to 10 years in prison. Aike Beishekeeva is a factchecker and journalist who just turned 23 years old on the day of the arrest. Aike faces up to eight years in prison.

Six of the 11 people detained do not currently work at the “Ayt Ayt Dese” and Temirov Live projects and have nothing to do with the creation and publication of the content that became the basis for the criminal prosecution. On 12 March, the Pervomaisky District Court of Bishkek held a hearing to consider preventive measures against the journalists. Eight people, including Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Aike Beishekeeva, were remanded in pre-trial detention for another two months, until 13 May. Two people were placed under house arrest, and one person was released under supervision. On 9 April four more people were placed under house arrest. However, Mahabat Tazhibek-kyzy and Aike Beishekeeva, as well as other two journalists, remain in custody.

On 6 April it became known that Mahabat Tazhibek-kyzy and two of her cellmates were beaten by guards in the pre-trial detention centre. This was confirmed by the office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan and representatives of the National Center for the Prevention of Torture who visited the pre-trial detention centre. They found that Mahabat Tazhibek-kyzy had bruises on both arms, on the left side of her jaw and left armpit. However, officers at the pre-trial detention centre refused to document the bruises. They also denied that any ill-treatment took place. The General Prosecutor’s Office is reported to have launched an investigation into the ill-treatment.

“Temirov LIVE” has been running since January 2020. Its employees and associates have been under constant pressure from the authorities. In January 2022, drug enforcement officers searched the Temirov LIVE office and detained Bolot Temirov. In November 2022, Bolot Temirov, who held Russian and Kyrgyzstani passports, was stripped of his Kyrgyzstani citizenship and forcibly deported to Moscow, Russia, in retaliation for his criticism of the authorities. The authorities had accused him of illegally obtaining Kyrgyzstani citizenship and crossing the state border.

Amnesty International has documented the deterioration of the right to freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan, including the closure or restriction of the activities of independent media outlets and the criminal prosecution of activists, including in the so-called “[Kempir-Abad case](#)”.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian/Kyrgyz

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 May 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Makhabat Tazhibek-kyzy, she/her

Aike Beishekeeva she/her