



Kazakhstan: End punitive prison conditions for imprisoned journalist Vladimir Kozlov

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PEN International and the Open Dialog Foundation deplore the current situation of Vladimir Kozlov, a Kazakh journalist, human rights defender and a leader of Alga!, a political opposition party, who is currently serving a seven-and-half-year prison sentence for 'inciting social discord' and 'calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order of the state'. Kozlov was sentenced in 2012, after his peaceful international advocacy on behalf of the striking oil workers in the city of Zhanaozen, south-west Kazakhstan.

Independent observers and human rights organisations consider Kozlov's trial to have been unfair. Both PEN International and the Open Dialog Foundation consider Kozlov to be a political prisoner, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, and are campaigning for his immediate and unconditional release.

Kozlov's deteriorating detention and health conditions in penal colony LA 155/14 in Zarechnyy village (Illiyevskiy district, Almaty Province) are not only unacceptable but also serve as a tool for Kazakh authorities to exert continuous pressure on him and other political dissidents in the country, such as poet Aron Atabek who has been in prison since 2007. PEN International is also campaigning for Atabek to be removed from solitary confinement.

On 17 July 2015, Kozlov was placed in solitary confinement for a period of 10 days, for alleged threats the authorities claimed he had made to the administration of the penal colony. These claims relate to protests Kozlov had made following repeated instances of provocation and punishment.

As a sign of protest, on 20 July 2015, Kozlov began a hunger strike, which he ended on 22 July 2015, following a visit of a delegation from the National Preventive Mechanism Against Torture and Ill-treatment¹, and in hope of a revocation of the solitary confinement order. However, on 27 July 2015, Kozlov was transferred along with 19 other people to barracks with an area of 50-60 square metres for six months. This was later extended to one year. Phone calls are prohibited, prisoners can only walk for an hour and a half per day, and they are only allowed to see their families three times a year during short visits. On 10 August 2015, Kozlov had a sim-card from a mobile phone planted in his cell. His fears that he would suffer another penalty as a result became a reality when the following day he was sent to a punishment cell for 15 days, which he had recently left.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly met Kozlov in January 2015. In a report issued in June 2015, the Special Rapporteur expressed serious concern at his imprisonment and urged the Kazakh authorities to consider releasing him early. The

¹ The National Preventive Mechanism Against Torture and Ill-treatment was established in 2013 after Kazakhstan came under pressure from the EU and UN to implement a system for more effective monitoring of torture and other ill-treatment

European Parliament has also issued several resolutions expressing concern about Kozlov's case on 22 November, 2012; 13 March, 2014 and 18 April 2014.

PEN International and the Open Dialog Foundation are concerned that these unlawful actions against Kozlov may be intended to prevent his transfer to a penal colony with less stringent conditions of detention, where he could be entitled to be transferred to an open colony or released on parole after serving half of his sentence. The two organisations call on Kazakh authorities to:

- end all unlawful and unwarranted punitive measures against Vladimir Kozlov;
- ensure his safety, grant him access to adequate medical care and ensure his conditions of detention meet international standards;
- grant Kozlov access to representatives of international human rights mechanisms, diplomatic missions and to human rights NGOs in his current place of detention;
- immediately reverse the decision to transfer Kozlov to harsher conditions of detention for one year and return him to a detention facility with less stringent conditions of detention;
- release Kozlov immediately and unconditionally, or at least to release him on parole once he has served half of his prison sentence, in accordance with the law in Kazakhstan.

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