



PRESS RELEASE

At least 13 dead and dozens wounded during demonstrations in Kazakhstan

Paris-Geneva, 21 December 2011 – The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) are alarmed over reports on the excessive use of force against demonstrators in the Manghystau region and the detentions that followed. The last days have seen at least 13 deaths and dozens of injuries as State violence. We join the appeal made by Kazakhstani human rights organisations¹ for a transparent, thorough and impartial investigation into the unrest and the use of deadly force.

On 16 December, around 100-150 protesters gathered on the central square in Janaozen to demand respect for their labour rights, including the right to organise an independent labour union, equal rights for foreign workers, and wage increases. Peaceful protests have been taking place since May 2011 after a thousand workers were fired. On 16 December, commemorations of the 20th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence were also organised on the square. In the course of demonstrations protesters set fire to a tribune and a new years' tree as well as several buildings, including the offices of OzenMunaiGaz oil company. These acts culminated in clashes with security forces who reportedly opened fire on the crowd. The Prosecutor-General's Office has stated that these clashes have resulted in 13 protesters dead and 86 wounded persons.

On 17 December, protestors blocked the Mangyshlaq-Aktau railway at the Shetpe station to denounce the shooting of demonstrators the previous day. Ordered to disperse these demonstrators, the police shot one demonstrator in the head and wounded at least a dozen others. A number of persons were hospitalised, some in critical condition. On the same day, President Nursultan Nazabaev decreed a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in Janaozen. Declaring that the police had had to protect public order against the disruption of "hooligans", President Nazabaev stated that the situation was "under control". The security measures put in place on 17 December will persist until 5 January 2012.

Further protests organised in the region's capital, Aktau, on 18 December, were closely monitored by armoured vehicles and security troops. In the town of Jetibai, oil workers started a strike to protest the use of force against demonstrators and demand investigation into Janaozen shootings.

"We also strongly denounce the fact that not only did security forces open fire on the protestors, but they also barred access to journalists to the places where the events occurred, in order to avoid free and impartial reporting on the events" declared FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen.

Journalists arriving at Aktau on 18 December were prohibited from travelling to Janaozen from where all telephone communication had been cut since the beginning of the clashes on 16 December. According to reliable sources, blogger, Murat Tungyshbaev, was reportedly beaten up by security forces at Shetpe station.

"We are alarmed by the lack of access to the city which prevents any independent assessment of the true scope of possible human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions. It is essential to allow independent observers, journalists and human rights organisations to the city", said Gerald Staberock, Secretary General of OMCT.

¹ See www.bureau.kz/data.php?n_id=3866&l=en

FIDH and OMCT urge Kazakh authorities to take all of the following steps:

- Ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Kazakhstan, in particular freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, in all circumstances.
- Take effective steps to allow journalists, independent observers and human rights organisations full access to the Manghystau region and guarantee their physical integrity.
- Launch a transparent, independent and impartial commission of investigation on the events of December 16 and 17 that includes independent experts and members of civil society.
- Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of peaceful demonstrators in all circumstances;
- Issue clear instructions to the security forces to refrain from using excessive force against protestors in accordance with international standards, including the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials;
- Immediately release all those who were detained while peacefully demonstrating;
- To take effective measures to prevent ill-treatment, including by ensuring that any individual arrested is promptly brought before a judge, has immediate access upon arrest to 1) a lawyer of his/her choosing, 2) an independent medical doctor and 3) visits by the family; any arrested persons should also at all times have the right to inform third parties about the detention.

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