

U.S. UPR Intervention for Kazakhstan, 20th Session, October 30, 2014

The United States welcomes the delegation of Kazakhstan.

We commend Kazakhstan for its efforts to address impunity for torture by bringing several perpetrators to justice, and are encouraged by the government's recent work to establish a credible National Preventive Mechanism.

Given this progress, we are disappointed by the passage of new laws that severely restrict freedom of expression and threaten to further erode the climate for transparency and accountability in the country. Penalties for libel and defamation are severe, and leadership of a public association is considered an aggravating circumstance. These laws criminalize participation in undefined "illegal" strikes, leaving the statutes open to broad application.

Since its last UPR session, Kazakhstan has also steadily increased restrictions on non-registered religious organizations. We are particularly concerned by the recent criminalization of unauthorized religious gatherings and restrictions on the dissemination of religious literature.

Finally, we are deeply concerned about the new trade union law, which restricts the ability to form and join independent trade unions.

Bearing in mind these concerns, we recommend that Kazakhstan:

1. Protect space for dissent, including by decriminalizing libel and minimizing fines against media outlets;
2. Allow religious groups to worship and communicate religious content freely;
3. Modify or repeal parts of the trade union law that unduly restrict freedom of association to ensure the ability of all workers to form and join independent trade unions.