



Kazakhstan: Cease undue pressure on young civic activist Beybarys Tolymbekov

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The Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (KIBHR) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) are seriously concerned about the well-being and security of Beybarys Tolymbekov, a 20-year-old civil society activist who was detained in Almaty on 21 April 2019 for peacefully protesting for fair elections and now is being put under pressure by the authorities to carry out his military service.

Police detained Beybarys and four of his friends on 21 April as they held and filmed a peaceful protest at the start of the Almaty Marathon, holding up a banner saying: "You cannot run away from the truth", with the hashtags #ForFairElections and #IHaveAChoice, in a play on words designed to attract attention to the upcoming presidential elections. The five young people were taken to a local police station. Beybarys and Asya Tulesova, who had taken part in the protest, were interrogated for six hours before being taken to court. Following a short trial, the judge sentenced Beybarys to 15 days in detention for organizing an "illegal" public event. Asya received the same sentence. The lawyer for the two civil society activists appealed the decision, requesting that the guilty verdicts be overturned. The appeal was rejected by Almaty City Court. The lawyer is now preparing for cassation.

While in detention, Beybarys was subjected to intimidation. In particular, two men in plain clothes visited him and interrogated him about his friendship with Asya Tulesova. The two men refused to identify themselves, only saying that they were from Astana. When Beybarys refused to answer the questions, the men left, saying that in any case they "knew where to find him" following his release. While in detention, Beybarys also carried out a hunger strike to protest against his unfair sentence.

In addition to being placed behind bars and intimidated for exercising his right to freedom of assembly, Beybarys is now under pressure to promptly carry out his military service. Shortly before his detention, Beybarys was drafted for compulsory military service, and found fit to serve by the Military Commission. The authorities are insisting that he is present for military service by Friday 17 May, although he has requested that this date be postponed. He is taking the necessary steps to ask the Military Commission to reconsider his case. However, as 17 May approaches, the pressure on Beybarys and his relatives is mounting. His parents' apartment, where he also lives, is under surveillance by people believed to be from the Ministry of Defense and six plain-clothes officials came to the apartment and interrogated his mother, Liazzat Tolymbekova about his whereabouts. On 13 May 2019 Beybarys' mother and three other relatives were made to leave their jobs (they work for the same employer), after Liazzat was threatened that she would lose her job by a man who called her to say that Beybarys should begin his military service immediately.

We are alarmed by the pressure on Beybarys and fear that in the light of his conviction for the 21 April protest and ongoing pressure in retaliation for his civic activism, he would be at real risk of serious harassment and ill-treatment should he begin his military service at the present time.

We urge the Kazakhstani authorities to cease harassing Beybarys, refrain from unduly restricting his and Asya Tulesova's right to freedom of assembly and other fundamental rights and ensure his security and safety.