

16 May 2017

Kazakhstan: Attempted assassination of Ramazan Yessergepov

On 14 May 2017, human rights defender and journalist, **Ramazan Yessergepov**, was stabbed by two unknown individuals on a train to Astana, where he was due to meet international experts and diplomats in relation to ongoing persecutions of independent journalists in Kazakhstan.

[Ramazan Yessergepov](#) is a Kazakhstani human rights defender and journalist. He is chairperson of the foundation, 'Journalists in Need.' Through his journalistic work, Ramazan Yessergepov exposes and denounces corruption by government and law enforcement officials. Before 2009, when he was arbitrarily arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment on false charges of disclosure of a state secret. Ramazan Yessergepov was a founder and editor in chief of the independent newspaper, "Alma-Ata Info," which highlighted and criticised the human rights violations and corruption of the government of Kazakhstan. Shortly after his detention, the newspaper was shut down.

Early in the morning of 14 May 2017, Ramazan Yessergepov was onboard a train going from Almaty to Astana, when two unknown individuals stabbed him in the stomach and ran away. Ramazan Yessergepov was traveling alone and bled for almost two hours before being taken off the train at the next stop and brought to a hospital in the city of Shu where he underwent surgery. He remained in a steady but critical state and was placed in the recovery ward. The Shu city police department has initiated a criminal investigation into the assassination attempt against Ramazan Yessergepov. On the same day, officers from the General Prosecutor's Office of Kazakhstan visited him in the hospital and prohibited medical personnel from informing anyone about Yessergepov's current state.

Ramazan Yessergepov's was traveling to Astana in order to meet with the Latvian Ambassador and international experts of the UN Human Rights Committee to discuss the ongoing criminal case against the independent journalist and chief editor of the opposition newspaper 'Tribuna,' Mr. Zhanbolat Mamay, who has been in pre-trial detention since February 2017.

This is not the first time Ramazan Yessergepov has been subjected to harassment due to his human rights work. In August 2009, when Ramazan Yessergepov was editor in chief of the independent newspaper, "Alma-Ata Info," he was sentenced to three years imprisonment on false charges of divulging state secrets for an earlier published article, entitled, "Who runs the country – President Nazarbayev or NSC?" where information was revealed about special service officers in Taraz extorting local businesses. After publishing the article, Ramazan Yessergepov started to receive threats. Ramazan Yessergepov's defence lawyers noted numerous violations during the course of the legal proceedings against the human rights defender. For instance, the sentencing decision was announced behind closed doors and in the absence of Ramazan Yessergepov's lawyer.

While serving his sentence, Ramazan Yessergepov went on several hunger strikes to denounce the refusal to release him on parole. On 6 January 2012, Ramazan Yessergepov was released upon completion of his term. In 2016, the UN Human Rights Committee rendered favourable decisions in relation to two complaints submitted by Ramazan Yessergepov against his arbitrary detention and imprisonment.

Front Line Defenders is concerned about the attempted assassination of the human rights journalist, Ramazan Yessergepov, which it believes to be related to his legitimate and peaceful human rights and journalist work.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Kazakhstan to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the assassination attempt against **Ramazan Yessergepov**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Ramazan Yessergepov;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kazakhstan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.