

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Kyrgyzstan: Human rights defender and whistleblower Zhoomart Karabaev arrested and placed in pre-trial detention

On 4 July 2024, the Pervomaiskii District Court of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan ruled to place human rights defender and whistleblower **Zhoomart Karabaev** in Pre-trial Detention center no. 1. The accusations against him are based on his social media posts, which authorities have argued are an “incitement of mass public discord”, a criminal offense stipulated by the Part 3 of Article 278 of the Criminal Code of Kyrgyzstan. The human rights defender was sentenced to remain in detention until August 19, 2024.

[Zhoomart Karabaev](#) is a human rights defender, an academic, and a whistleblower from Kyrgyzstan. In 2024, he systemically blew the whistle on how the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan signed expert reviews, which then commonly became the only grounds to sentence state critics in Kyrgyzstan, pre-drafted by the State Committee for National Security. In May 2024, Zhoomart Karabaev provided a witness testimony during the trial of writer Olzhobai Shakir on the nature of the evidentiary support presented by the state authorities. He has also written on social media in regards to these practices, calling for an end to the unjust persecution of state critics.

On 2 July 2024, the State Committee for National Security Officers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, arrested human rights defender Zhoomart Karabaev, brought him in for questioning, and detained him for 48 hours. On 4 July 2024, the Pervomaiskii District Court of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, ruled to place the human rights defender in pre-trial detention in Pre-Trial Detention Center no.1. The accusations against him are based on his social media posts, where he discussed the current wave of persecution against civil society actors, as well as the authorities' failure to acknowledge corruption in the National Academy of Science. The authorities have argued that the human rights defender's posts are an “incitement of mass public discord,” a criminal offense stipulated by Part 3 of Article 278 of the Criminal Code of Kyrgyzstan.

Zhoomart Karabaev's lawyers argue that this persecution is in retaliation for him blowing the whistle on the manner in which the State pressured him and other academics to produce many supposed “expert opinions” for high-level criminal cases against human rights defenders, journalists, and others. These would then support the state's position in sentencing vocal critics of the state. Such expert opinions are often used as the only incriminating evidence in criminal cases against persons exercising their freedom of expression, including recent cases such as the Kloop media shutdown and trial against women human rights defenders from the Committee to Protect Kempir-Abad. After Zhoomart Karabaev blew the whistle in the Spring of 2024, he was fired from his post as an expert at the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan after refusing to rubber-stamp precooked expert opinions prepared by the State Committee for National Security. The leadership of the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan also threatened the human rights defender with retaliation, accusing him of treason.

Front Line Defenders condemns the pre-trial detention of human rights defender and whistleblower Zhoomart Karabaev as it believes it constitutes a form of retaliation for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work of exposing state corruption. The organization is gravely concerned with the wave of repressions faced by human rights defenders and journalists in Kyrgyzstan. Front Line believes that targeting human rights defenders has a harmful effect on the peaceful and legitimate work of human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender and whistleblower Zhoomart Karabaev and drop all the charges against him;
2. Ensure an enabling environment for human rights defender and whistleblower Zhoomart Karabaev to continue his employment free from retaliation;
3. Enact meaningful protections for whistleblowers, and create an encouraging environment for more human rights defenders to expose corruption publicly;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan can carry out their activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Kyrgyzstan's international human rights obligations and commitments.

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