

To Ambassador Yerkin Akhinzhanov  
The Embassy of Republic of Kazakhstan  
0244 Oslo

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern for the current detention and arrests of Muslim men for practicing their religion peacefully in Kazakhstan. Currently 18 individuals are jailed and another 11 are serving restricted freedom sentences. All except one are Sunni Muslims.

Dadash Mazhenov are among the 18 imprisoned. On 16 November 2018, Burabai District Court sentenced him to 7 years and 8 months in a general regime labour camp for violating Criminal Code Article 256, Part 2. The Akmola Regional Court rejected his appeal 30 January 2019. Dadash was jailed for posting four talks online by the theologian Kuanysh Bashpayev years before the talks were banned. Article 256, Part 2 punishes "propaganda of terrorism or public calls to commit terrorism". In a 17 April assessment commissioned by the National Security Committee (KNB), all of the state's experts concluded that the talks did not include incitement to terrorist acts or the formation of terrorist groups. Unfortunately, the court rejected the independent assessment of Bashpayev's talks that Mazhenov's defence had commissioned.

Your Excellency, I am concerned that Mazhenov and the other imprisoned Muslims are only guilty of exercising their religion peacefully. I fear that the vague wording in the laws and legal regulations are abused by the Kazakh authorities to punish a wide variety of peaceful religious expressions. Even though I welcome the positive developments in Kazakhstan this past year, including the decision to abandon restrictive amendments to the 2011 religion law and the reduction of administrative prosecutions for religious activity, I would welcome further efforts to protect freedom of religion in Kazakhstan. Therefore, I humbly petition your intervention to ensure that:

- Dadash Mazhenov and the other Sunni Muslims who have been charged and sentenced for exercising their religion peacefully are released and cleared of all charges;
- Legal regulations concerning religious practice must be unambiguous respecting international standards of freedom of religion or belief and not misused to target dissenting religious believers and minorities; and
- believers of all faiths are allowed to practice their religion within the limitations of freedom of religion, including freely discussing religious practices and institutions without fear of repercussions.

I thank you in advance for using your influence as ambassador and conveying this message to the relevant authorities in your home country.

Yours sincerely,