

16 June 2016

## **Kyrgyzstan – Harassment of human rights organisation *Spravedlivost* and its lawyers**

On 9 June 2016, representatives of the **Jalal-Abad Human Rights Organisation *Spravedlivost*** (Justice) were questioned by police officers dealing with crimes of terrorism and extremism, over legal assistance provided by them to citizens of Lenin Street, in the city Jalal-Abad.

**Jalal-Abad regional human rights organisation *Spravedlivost*** (Justice) was founded in 1994 in the Jalal-Abad region on the border of Kyrgyzstan with Uzbekistan, which has an ethnically-diverse Kyrgyz and Uzbek population. Along with other regions in south Kyrgyzstan, Jalal-Abad experienced violent ethnic clashes between these groups in 2010. *Spravedlivost* works to uphold the rule of law and ethnic equality, providing legal assistance to the local population, including minority groups, investigating allegations of torture and monitoring detention facilities. Since January 2016, lawyers of *Spravedlivost* have been providing legal consultations to the local population of Jalal-Abad within the framework of the United Nations-sponsored project “Promotion of access to justice by providing legal aid to vulnerable groups of the population”. Human rights defender Ms **Valentina Gritsenko** is currently the Director of the organisation.

A dispute between Jalal-Abad citizens and the City Administration arose after the 19 January 2016 when the latter issued an order for the compulsory eviction of residents in order to widen Lenin street. Compensation for the confiscated land, offered by the City Administration, was found by residents to be inadequate and they refused to accept the proposed conditions of eviction. In retaliation, the Jalal-Abad City Administration began to demolish properties without a court's authorisation. Currently, approximately 152 individuals are on the verge of being forcefully evicted. All of them are of Uzbek nationality and therefore belong to an ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan.

On 9 June 2016, two police officers from the 10<sup>th</sup> Police Department of the city of Jalal-Abad - responsible for dealing with crimes of terrorism and extremism, visited *Spravedlivost's* offices. They explained they had received a complaint from anonymous persons, claiming that *Spravedlivost* had been destabilising the situation in the city, inciting inter-ethnic hatred and interfering in the affairs of the City Administration. They, however, refused to present the origin of the complaint. The police officers then questioned Valentina Gritsenko about *Spravedlivost* and its involvement in the dispute between the Jalal-Abad City Administration and residents of Lenin street. The organisation provided a written reply to the officer's questions. After cautioning Valentina Gritsenko against any political interference and inciting inter-ethnic hatred between the predominantly Uzbek residents of Lenin street and the Kyrgyz population of the city, the police officers left.

On 2 June 2016, during a meeting with the Head of the Department of Municipal Property Management at the Jalal-Abad Mayor's Office, representatives of *Spravedlivost* were threatened by state security officers. The officers failed to present their identity papers and proceeded to question lawyers from the organisation about legal assistance they had provided to residents of Lenin street as well as about *Spravedlivost's* funding sources. The officers recommended that the organisation be careful with its activities.

Earlier that day when monitoring the demolition of the buildings in Lenin street, lawyers from *Spravedlivost* received threats from State Security Committee officers, who accused them of

inciting inter-ethnic dissension and provoking a conflict between Jalal-Abad authorities and local residents. The accusations made by State security officers raised serious concern among *Spravedlivost* representatives in view of the fragile situation in the region with the tensions between its Uzbek and Kyrgyz population. In June 2010 these tensions resulted in violent ethnic clashes in the city of Osh. The officers told the lawyers they would be called for questioning.

Further to this, since the beginning of the dispute, State-controlled television channels and news agencies have been spreading a negative image of *Spravedlivost*. Pressure on *Spravedlivost* has grown since the organisation's lawyers filed a complaint with a court challenging the refusal of the Jalal-Abad Mayor's Office to grant them the access to all of the documents relating to the residents of Lenin Street and confiscation of their land plots.

Front Line Defenders condemns the harassment of human rights organisation *Spravedlivost* and its lawyers, which it believes is directly linked to their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights in the city of Jalal-Abad.

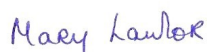
### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to:**

1. Immediately cease all further harassment of Jalal-Abad Human Rights Organisation *Spravedlivost* and its lawyers, as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights in Kyrgyzstan;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (c): "*Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters*", Article 11: "*Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession (...)*," and to Article 12 (2): "*The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.*"

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor

Executive Director

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