



Civicus House,
24 Gwigwi Mrwebi (formerly Pim) Street,
Newtown 2001 Johannesburg, South Africa.
PO Box 933, Southdale 2135,
Johannesburg, South Africa.
tel +27-11-833-5959
fax +27-11-833-7997
email Info@civicus.org

1420 K Street NW, Suite 900,
Washington DC, 20005, USA.
tel +1-202-331-8518
fax +1-202-331-8774

www.civicus.org

17th Session of Special Procedures 29 June 2010

CIVICUS wants to thank the Special Rapporteurs for their ongoing work and dedication to promoting and protecting human rights across the world. CIVICUS is extremely concerned with the growing trends in both developed and developing countries, to restrict the work of civil society. We are grateful for having this opportunity to communicate some of the trends and concerns that we have observed in the Eurasia through our ongoing monitoring and advocacy in the region.

CIVICUS coordinates a network of over 30 civil society organisations in Eurasia spanning the countries of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. We work closely with our local partners to identify regional trends and address them both at the national level, and through the esteemed organs of the United Nations system. In this regard, we would like to highlight some of the threats to civil society in the region, and invite the Special Rapporteurs to pay particular attention to these urgent and real concerns.

Local civil society partners have raised attacks on human rights defenders, freedom of expression, arbitrary detention and torture as the most urgent and pressing issues across the target countries. We have noted previously to the Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that these attacks have progressed from harassment of actors working on human rights and governance issues, to attacks on independent civil society at large.

In Uzbekistan, the ongoing case of medical practitioner Mr. Maksim Popov, and recent conviction of photographer Umida Akhmedova underline how repression of civil society is now practiced on grounds of cultural conformity, stripping these individuals of their fundamental right to freedom of expression. Mr. Popov is a 28 year old psychologist, HIV/AIDS activist, and medical practitioner who has been unjustly sentenced to seven years imprisonment for his work in raising public awareness on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and healthy lifestyles in Uzbekistan. Ms. Akhmedova was found guilty of "libel" and "insult" charges for her photographic and cinematographic work documenting the lives and culture of the Uzbek people. She was granted presidential amnesty, although the convictions remain and she, and other artists of Uzbekistan are no longer able to practice their art without fear of persecution.

In both the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan, we have recorded attacks on environmental groups and activists for their environmental advocacy and expression. Environmental groups in Russia are repeatedly stripped of their fundamental right to freedom of expression when the issues are political or economic in nature. In January 2010, police raided NGO Baikal Environmental Wave and confiscated computers in response to the NGO's advocacy surrounding the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill. Further, in

Turkmenistan, the authorities arrested Mr. Andrey Zatoka under trumped up charges, a renowned ecologist, activist and member of SEU. In April, the offices of prominent environmentalist and Co-Chair of the NGO the Socio-Ecological Union (SEU), Mr. Sergey Simak, were raided by the police in connection with alleged criminal charges of extremism against the Co-Chair of the Organization. Both organizations were peacefully advocating for protection of sensitive ecological areas under threat from economic activity. In Turkmenistan, prominent environmentalist Mr. Andrey Zatoka was arrested for his independent work, and released only after an international campaign, stripped of nationality and forced out of the country. In April, local partners have reported harassment and closure of associations following international criticism of the Turkmen health system.

In Belarus, restrictions on freedom of association of a criminal character have been used to imprison individual activists working for fair electoral processes. Since the enactment of Article 193.1 of the Criminal Code, which punishes the work in non-registered public associations, 17 individuals have been charged and convicted under Article. Six of these individuals, including a minor, were convicted of arrest or imprisonment.

In the lead up to the Presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan just last year, several opposition candidates have reported harassment, violence and interference with their campaigns. Further, at least three independent journalists were beaten, resulting in one death. Opposition leader Almazbek Atambaev has also claimed that he was poisoned. Since the current political, ethnic and humanitarian crisis in Kyrgyzstan, a year after these elections, has also led to attacks on human rights defenders, most notably the detention and torture of Mr. Askarov, who was monitoring the human rights violations committed during the violent clashes in the region of Jalalabad.

The Eurasia region is witnessing a steep regression in human rights and legal and operative space for civil society. Our local partners continue to be harassed, and conduct their human rights work in constant fear of persecution. We understand that you, Special Rapporteurs, are also finding it difficult to conduct your important work in these countries, due to the uncooperative character of the governments. Our local civil society partners appeal to us to reach out to your offices and communicate the concerns they are raising. As an alliance for civil society worldwide, we invite you to collaborate with CIVICUS and our platforms, to engage with local civil society which strives to promote and protect human rights in their countries amidst the evident challenges.

Renate Bloem
UN Permanent Representative