

## Press statement:

# Kazakhstan added to global civic space watchlist

Kazakhstan has been added to a global watchlist of countries that have recently seen a serious and rapid decline in fundamental freedoms. This watchlist is maintained by CIVICUS Monitor, an online platform that tracks civic space across the world, together with civil society research partners from different countries. International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR) cooperate with the CIVICUS Monitor on documenting developments affecting the freedoms of association, assembly and expression in Kazakhstan.

*“The fact that Kazakhstan now features on the CIVICUS Monitor Watch List will help draw international attention to the alarming attacks on civil rights recently seen in the country,”* said Brigitte Dufour, IPHR Director. *“It will also allow us to work more closely with the CIVICUS Monitor team on monitoring, documenting and advocating for change in response to these attacks,”* she continued.

Kazakhstan was added to the CIVICUS Monitor Watch List on 17 October, in particular, due to gross violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly that have taken place in the country since spring this year. Violations of this right peaked as the authorities responded harshly to peaceful protests held in connection with the early presidential elections on 9 June 2019, which were called when President Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down in March 2019 after almost three decades in power. During several days of protests, police and special forces detained thousands of peaceful protestors, often using excessive force. In addition, the authorities periodically blocked access to social media and messenger applications and obstructed the work of journalists covering the protests. After the presidential elections, law enforcement authorities and security services also intimidated and harassed independent monitors who documented and drew attention to election irregularities and violations. These repressive measures cast a shadow on the elections and the beginning of the period in office of new President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the handpicked successor of Nazarbayev. According to the official results, Tokayev won the elections with over 70 percent of the vote.

*“International pressure is vital to improve the human rights situation in Kazakhstan,”* said Yevgeniy Zhovtis, KIBHR Director. *“We are hopeful that the decision to add Kazakhstan to the CIVICUS Monitor Watch List will help us mobilize international support to hold the authorities accountable for the repressive measures taken in recent months. We urge the new leadership to keep the promises they made after the June elections - namely to improve the country’s human rights record and initiate a process of political reform,”* he continued.

The other countries that currently feature on the CIVICUS Monitor Watch List include Egypt, China (Hong Kong), Colombia and Guinea. The Watch List is regularly updated.

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For additional information on recent civic space developments in Kazakhstan, including violations of fundamental rights observed in connection with the presidential elections, see update on developments in January-June 2019 prepared by IPHR and KIBHR for the CIVICUS Monitor, at <https://monitor.civicus.org/newsfeed/2019/08/19/kazakhstan-change-power-and-marred-elections-protests-and-crackdowns/>