



Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Kyrgyzstan

Human Rights Watch

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Introduction

This submission highlights Human Rights Watch's key concerns regarding Kyrgyzstan's compliance with its international obligations since its last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2020. Despite the show of good faith in supporting 193 out of the 232 recommendations received during its third UPR review¹, between 2020 and 2024, Kyrgyzstan's human rights record has shown a consistent pattern of deterioration, marked by increasing restrictions on civil society and media freedom. Throughout these years, authorities systematically targeted critical voices, with recurring themes including the misuse of extremism laws, harassment of NGOs, and the adoption and implementation of restrictive legislation such as laws on "false" information and "foreign representatives". Press freedom was subject to mounting pressure through persistent criminal cases against journalists and media outlets. Domestic violence remains a serious and persistent issue, despite legislation provisions for protective measures, and perpetrators still benefit from de facto impunity. The death in custody of human rights defender, Azimjon Askarov, in July 2020 was one of the lowest points in Kyrgyzstan's history, with a lack of accountability and calls for an effective investigation continuing unheeded through 2024. Civil and political rights further declined with the implementation of prolonged blanket bans on protests, first introduced in March 2022, and an increase in state control over civic space through restrictive legislation.

Freedom of Expression

Despite supporting several recommendations on ensuring freedom of opinion and of expression, including recommendations to "step up efforts to protect media freedom"² and to "ensure that everyone, including human rights defenders and journalists, can exercise their right to freedom of expression, including online, without fear of reprisals [...]"³, Kyrgyzstan instead intensified its [efforts to stifle](#) critical and independent media and bloggers.

In [2021](#) Kyrgyz president Sadyr Japarov signed into law a vague and overly broad piece of legislation on protection from "false information" that allows authorities, without judicial oversight, to order the removal of information that officials consider "false" or "inaccurate" from internet platforms. [Since then](#), the law has been applied at least four times – to websites of *ResPublica* newspaper, information agency 24.kg, and to Azattyk Media (Kyrgyz service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty). All were blocked for several months in 2022. In addition, in 2023, Kyrgyzstan's leading investigative media outlet, Kloop Media, was ordered to take down an article, and

¹ Human Rights Council, Report of the forty-fifth session of the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/45/2, para. 386, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/HRC/45/2&Lang=E>

² Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan", A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.82, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

³ Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan", A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.94, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

upon the outlet's refusal to do so, authorities [blocked](#) access to its website in Kyrgyzstan - a block still in place.

The authorities have also systematically targeted investigative journalists and bloggers, particularly Bolot Temirov, editor-in-chief of FactCheck.KG and then Temirov.Live, an independent investigative journalism outlet, and anyone professionally or personally related to him or these outlets. On January 9, [2021](#), unknown assailants attacked Temirov outside his office. His assailants have yet to be identified prosecuted. In January 2022, Kyrgyz police raided the office of [Temirov Live](#), detaining Temirov on charges of drug possession. The journalist and his colleagues claim the drugs were planted on him during the raid. Weeks before the raid, Temirov and his team had published an investigation into Kyrgyzstan's State Committee on National Security (GKNB)'s leader, Kamchibek Tashiev, implicating Tashiev in an alleged corruption scheme involving the export of state-produced fuel. [In September 2022](#), Temirov was acquitted on the drugs charges but, in response to an appeal by the prosecution, in [November 2022](#) Bishkek city court ruled to expel Temirov, and he was deported to Russia. In September 2023, Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court upheld the decision to expel Temirov. In [January 2024](#), Kyrgyz police arrested 11 current and former journalists associated with Temirov Live (including Temirov's wife, Makhabat Tajibek kyzy) following raids on their homes on charges of "inciting mass unrest". On [October 10](#), a district court in Bishkek sentenced two of the eleven journalists to 6 and 5 years in prison, two others to three years of probation, and acquitted the remaining seven for lack of evidence of a crime.

On [August 29, 2024](#), Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court upheld a February [liquidation order](#) from the Bishkek district court to close Kloop Media – a further example of the government's practice of retaliation against critical journalistic activities. Such Supreme Court rulings are considered final and not subject to appeal. The case against Kloop Media was initiated in [August 2023](#) following a [lawsuit](#) by the Bishkek City Prosecutor's Office. The lawsuit alleged that Kloop had failed to register as a mass media outlet and had engaged in media activity not listed in its charter, which can warrant the liquidation of legal entities under Kyrgyzstan's [civil law code](#). The lawsuit also cited a pretrial investigation into Kloop's activities initiated by the GKNB in November 2021, which alleged Kloop Media's publications called for "violent seizure of power online" and targeted the outlet for its critical coverage of government policies. Court experts claimed Kloop's articles used "hidden manipulation" that could foster public distrust in authorities and potentially incite anti-government protests, describing this effect as reader "zombification."

Recommendations:

- Rescind restrictions on independent media and bloggers, including by repealing the repressive “False Information” law.
- Release all journalists and bloggers who have been imprisoned or are currently on trial for their professional journalistic activities;
- Repeal the decision to close down Kloop Media; unblock its website to respect citizens’ right of access to information.
- Allow Bolot Temirov return to Kyrgyzstan and guarantee free practice of his journalistic profession.

Freedom of Association and Civil Society

During its UPR review in 2020, Kyrgyzstan supported recommendations to “enhance protections for civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders to ensure they are able to carry out their work in a safe environment free from intimidation, harassment and attacks”⁴ and to “ensure that legislation is not adopted, including the so-called ‘foreign agents law’, that would limit the ability of non-governmental organizations to operate freely”⁵. However, in the years since adoption of these recommendations the Kyrgyz government has cracked down on dissenting civic voices and passed the repressive “Foreign Representatives” law

[In October](#) 2022, more than 20 people were detained and placed in pretrial detention for two months after publicly disagreeing with the impending transfer of the Kempir-Abad dam to Uzbekistan as part of a broader demarcation deal with the neighboring country. Those detained included activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, and politicians.

The defendants faced extended pretrial detention in poor conditions and little access to medical treatment and family visits, which violates international standards for the exceptional and limited use of pretrial detention. Eight remained in custody for about 20 months, while others were eventually placed under house arrest or travel bans due to health concerns.

The trial, classified as “secret” and held behind closed doors between June 2023 and June 2024, involved multiple fair trial and due process rights violations, including denial of the right to a public hearing, incomplete reading of indictments, hearings held without defense lawyers present, and prevention of defense witness testimony.

⁴ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan”, A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.90, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

⁵ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan”, A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.97, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

Defense lawyers also faced harassment from authorities.

On [June 14, 2024](#) a district court in Bishkek acquitted all of those charged despite the prosecution's request for 20 years prison time for each defendant. The prosecution has [appealed](#) this decision.

President Japarov signed the "[Foreign Representatives](#)" law on April 2, 2024, requiring NGOs receiving foreign funding to be listed in a special registry of "foreign representatives" if engaged in "political activities." These activities are broadly defined to include organizing public events, electoral engagement, government advocacy, or sharing opinions that shape "socio-political views" via modern technology. Organizations must also label all publications as produced by "foreign representatives". Failure to comply with the law could result in the liquidation of the noncommercial and nongovernmental organization. The law's overly broad scope threatens NGOs' freedom of association and ability to conduct legitimate freedom of association activities.

The law also grants the government significantly enhanced oversight powers, including the right to participate in the internal and external activities of organizations on the registry and to check their expenditures arbitrarily.

Recommendations:

- Repeal the "foreign representatives" law.
- Ensure civil society activists, journalists, human rights defenders, politicians are genuinely protected in the exercise of their freedom of opinion, of expression and of assembly and association, so they can carry out their work without fear of reprisals or legal harassment by the authorities.

Women's Rights

Despite pledges to "take all necessary action, including through awareness-raising campaigns and training, to effectively implement legislation on violence against women and girls, and ensure that all reports of violence are thoroughly investigated and that perpetrators are brought to justice"⁶ and to "implement fully the Criminal Code provisions on bride kidnapping and the Law prohibiting child, early and forced marriage and take additional measures to fight all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence"⁷, the authorities have not responded consistently to a string of high profile cases of bride kidnapping and domestic violence that have led

⁶ Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan", A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.162, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

⁷ Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan", A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.195, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

to death or other grave dangers and threats to health of the women and girls targeted. Although there have been some positive legislative developments, including amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code adopted in 2020, which provide better protections for victims of domestic violence, authorities do not fully enforce protective measures or hold perpetrators accountable. Domestic violence, including marital rape, is also [not considered a criminal act](#) and is only punished with administrative measures through fines or administrative detention of up to 7 days.

Cases of violence against women and girls remain underreported and survivors face multiple barriers to accessing services and justice, such as insufficient shelters and other essential services, dismissive responses by authorities, stigma, and attitudes that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and practices, including by police, judicial officials, and government and religious leaders. Between 2020 and 2024 Kyrgyz police officials have ignored cases of women being [kicked in the head](#), [burned](#), having their [ears and nose cut off](#), [stabbed to death in police stations](#) after being left alone with their kidnapper, or [strangled to death](#) by their abductors.

Commendably, in August 2024 president Sadyr Japarov signed [a new law](#) amending several legislative acts to enhance protection against family, sexual, and gender-based violence. The amendments increase penalties for battery, and eliminate two loopholes for accountability that have previously put women and girls at risk of further harm and coercion: (1) the option of reconciliation in cases of rape and sexual assault, and (2) the possibility of supervised probation in cases of sexual acts with children under 16, bride kidnapping, and forced marriage.

Recommendations:

- Ensure full investigation and prosecution of domestic violence against women and girls, including cases of bride kidnapping.
- Ensure that police, prosecutors, and judges comply with their duties under the domestic violence law. This includes issuing and enforcing protection orders and investigating and prosecuting cases of domestic violence. Officials who fail to do so should be disciplined; past failed police responses should be independently investigated leading to effective redress for victims, survivors and their families and accountability for perpetrators.
- Ensure that all reports of abuse and violence against women and girls are consistently registered, thoroughly and promptly investigated, regardless of the relationship of the perpetrator, with a focus on gathering evidence in a trauma-informed manner to avoid re-traumatization of survivors.

Rights of Women and Children with Disabilities

During its 2020 UPR review, Kyrgyzstan supported recommendations on the full incorporation of “provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into domestic law and policy, as appropriate, and in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders”⁸, and to “continue its efforts to combat violence against women, children and persons with disabilities”⁹, and to “take the appropriate measures to provide access to quality, multilingual and inclusive education for children, especially for children with disabilities and minorities”¹⁰. However, the Kyrgyz government still needs to turn these pledges into reality for many women and children with disabilities across the country.

In [2023](#), Kyrgyz parliament adopted a new law “[On Education](#)” which regulates requirements for inclusive education. Significant challenges persist in its implementation. [Reportedly](#), 4,085 school-age and 2,316 pre-school children with disabilities are enrolled across 475 mixed educational facilities, and 56 mainstream schools are participating in a pilot project with teaching assistants. Despite the development of minimum standards and special programs to accommodate children with disabilities, the education system remains largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities. Key obstacles include inadequate infrastructure, lack of transportation, insufficient early education opportunities, and absence of reasonable accommodations and adapted curricula in schools.

In 2023 Human Rights Watch interviewed 56 survivors of domestic violence who have a disability, service providers, community leaders, and experts in three provinces and documented cases of long-term physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence by family members, partners, or former partners – presenting it in the form of a [63-page report](#). The findings show that despite positive steps taken in recent years to tackle domestic violence and to uphold the rights of people with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, [women and girls with disabilities experience](#) abuse, including rape, beatings, neglect, and humiliation, often by those closest to them. Violence by family members or partners often goes unreported and unaddressed due to widespread discrimination against people with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, especially women and girls. Law enforcement and judicial bodies often ignore or downplay reported cases, and a shortage of shelters and other services for survivors of domestic violence who have disabilities makes it harder for them to escape abuse.

Recommendations:

⁸ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan”, A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.24, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

⁹ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan”, A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.226, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

¹⁰ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan”, A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendation 140.128, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

- Ensure equal access to inclusive and quality education for children with disabilities by providing necessary support, tools, and accommodations, including through the supply of appropriate learning materials and assistive technology.
- Align disability rights and domestic violence legislation with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities,¹¹ and the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,¹² to ensure human rights-based prevention of and response to violence against women and girls with disabilities.
- Ensure reasonable accommodations to access justice, including requiring training for law enforcement and judicial personnel on recognizing and addressing violence against women and girls with disabilities, as well as accessible procedures to ensure full investigation and prosecution.

Apparent War Crimes in Border Conflict with Tajikistan

Kyrgyzstan only noted recommendations to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and fully align its national legislation with the Rome Statute during its previous UPR cycle.¹³

Two major border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in [April 2021](#) and [September 2022](#) involving armed forces of both countries resulted in over 90 deaths, mostly civilians, hundreds of injuries, and displaced nearly 190,000 [people](#). Both clashes damaged infrastructure, including [schools](#).

The un-delineated and un-demarcated 110-kilometer Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border has been a persistent source of tensions over strategic water resources in the Fergana valley, crucial for both countries' agriculture and water supply.

Human Rights Watch's investigation of the [2022](#) conflict found that forces from both [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Tajikistan](#) committed apparent war crimes in attacks on civilians. Kyrgyz forces apparently targeted three Tajik ambulances in the conflict – two Tajik ambulances, clearly marked as such, and a civilian car came under heavy gunfire from Kyrgyz forces on a bridge near the border in Chorbog (Tajikistan), killing 10 civilians; another Tajik ambulance was attacked in Ovchi Kal'acha, killing a doctor and a nurse. Ambulances used for medical transport enjoy particular protection under international humanitarian law.

In another incident Kyrgyz forces dropped a laser-guided bomb with blast fragmentation effects on the central square in Ovchi Kal'acha, a Tajik border town,

¹¹ Kyrgyzstan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2029.

¹² Kyrgyzstan ratified the UN Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1997.

Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Kyrgyzstan", A/HRC/44/4, March 2020, Recommendations 140.5; 140.6; 140.7, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/4>

killing at least 10 people, mostly men who had gathered outside a mosque after a funeral. At least 13 other civilians were wounded in this disproportionate and apparently indiscriminate attack.

Two women were killed and six people injured in Khistevarz in two incidents of apparent indiscriminate shelling by Kyrgyz forces.

Recommendations:

- Accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and fully align its national legislation with the Statute.
- Protect schools from attacks or military use and endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Mount a thorough and independent investigation into allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by its forces and hold perpetrators to account.
- Provide compensation and psychosocial support to the families of victims of serious violations of international humanitarian law.
- Ensure that any border demarcation agreement and interim border arrangements respect the rights of the local populations, including their access to education, adequate housing, and water, and their ability to ensure an adequate standard of living for themselves, including, as necessary, generating an income through legal cross-border economic activities.