

## **STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE CIVIC SOLIDARITY PLATFORM REGARDING DENIAL OF ENTRY TO KYRGYZSTAN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER MEMORIAL STAFF**

12 July 2017

The July 9 decision of the government of Kyrgyzstan to deny Vitaliy Ponomarev, Central Asia Programme Director for Human Rights Center Memorial, entry to the country was wrong and raises deep concern as to its motivation, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform said today.

Arriving to Kyrgyzstan via the land border from Kazakhstan on 9 July, Ponomarev was informed by the border service that he had been denied entry to the country. He was not informed about the reason for the ban, or for how long it is valid. Ponomarev later learned through his own inquiries and those of his lawyer that the decision was made by the security services of Kyrgyzstan, GKNB.

Ponomarev, a citizen of the Russian Federation, is an internationally renowned expert on human rights in the Central Asian region. He is well-known both by government officials and in the human rights community in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in neighbouring Central Asian states.

Ponomarev was declared persona non-grata and deported from Kyrgyzstan for the first time in February 2009, during a period when the government led by then President Kurmanbek Bakiev intensified its pressure on civil society. Several foreign human rights defenders were barred or deported from Kyrgyzstan during the two last years of Bakiev's rule, in the time leading up to the April 2010 revolution.

Immediately following the revolution, Interim President Roza Otunbayeva signed presidential decrees removing travel bans formerly imposed on Ponomarev and colleagues from other human rights organizations. In the time since, Ponomarev has continued his research on human rights violations in the region, publishing several noteworthy reports – including a major report on the ethnic violence that broke out in Osh and Jalalabad in June 2010.

Immediately prior to his 9 July 2017 denial of entry, Ponomarev had participated in a conference on human rights in the context of terrorism and extremism, organized by the Bishkek-based NGO Kylum Shamy and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. After the conference, Ponomarev made a short trip to Kazakhstan, but was stopped at the border upon his return to Kyrgyzstan. He was not permitted to collect personal belongings remaining at his Bishkek hotel.

Members of the Civic Solidarity Platform consider this return to barring foreign human rights defenders from entering Kyrgyzstan, as well as the recently increased pressure on civil society and journalists in Kyrgyzstan in general, to be an extremely worrisome development. On 2 December 2015, Kyrgyz authorities refused to allow Human Rights Watch (HRW) office director in Kyrgyzstan Mihra Rittmann entry to Kyrgyzstan upon her arrival to the country, informing her that she had been banned. No reason for this drastic step has been given, despite of the issue having been raised repeatedly by HRW itself and through diplomatic channels.

Members of the Civic Solidarity Platform consider moves like the denial of entry to Ponomarev, and

that of Rittmann, to be a betrayal of the country's renewed commitment to democratic values following the 2010 revolution, in which at least 90 people lost their lives. It also violates a number of obligations and commitments that the government of Kyrgyzstan has voluntarily signed up to as a member of the UN and the OSCE.

We urge the government of Kyrgyzstan to immediately lift the entry ban on Vitaliy Ponomarev of Human Rights Center Memoria, as well as the ban previously imposed on Rittmann from Human Rights Watch, and to respect the rights of human rights defenders to carry out their important and legitimate work freely and without hindrance.

We consider this and previous incidents as worrying indicators that the current government is repeating some of the mistakes made by the Bakiev administration. We would encourage the government to reverse these decisions, which are damaging to Kyrgyzstan's reputation as a leading force for democracy in Central Asia.

### **Human Rights NGOs that have signed the letter:**

Albanian Helsinki Committee (Albania)  
Article 19 (United Kingdom)  
Association UMDPL (Ukraine)  
Bir Duino (Kyrgyzstan)  
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)  
Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)  
Centre de la protection Internationale (France)  
Citizens' Watch (Russia)  
Crude Accountability (USA)  
German-Russian Exchange (Germany)  
Golos Svobody (Kyrgyzstan)  
Helsinki Association Armenia (Armenia)  
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor (Armenia)  
Helsinki Committee of Armenia (Armenia)  
Human Rights Information Center (Ukraine)  
Human Rights Matter (Germany)  
Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)  
Index on Censorship (United Kingdom)  
International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)  
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)  
Kharkiv Regional Foundation "Public Alternative" (Ukraine)  
Libereco (Germany/Switzerland)  
Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)  
Netherlands Helsinki Committee (Netherlands)  
Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)  
Notabene (Tajikistan)  
Office of Civil Freedoms (Tajikistan)  
Promo LEX (Moldova)  
Protection of Human Rights Without Borders (Armenia)  
Public Association "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)  
Public Verdict (Russia)



Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Azerbaijan/Georgia)  
SOVA Center for Information and Analysis (Russia)  
The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (Lithuania)  
Truth Hounds (Ukraine)  
Women of the Don (Russia)

Human Rights Watch (USA) also joins this CSP statement.

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