

10 March 2020

Statement – Kyrgyzstan: Women’s March participants attacked by masked men and detained by police

On 8 March 2020, participants of the Women’s March who gathered in Bishkek to express their support for women’s rights were attacked by a group of unidentified masked men. The police, who at first silently watched the attack, detained most of the participants of the peaceful march and only a few of the attackers.

Kyrgyz human rights organisations and feminist activists have been organising Women’s Marches every year to raise awareness about women’s rights and gender equality, and to denounce intolerance, violence and other means of oppression of women.

On 8 March 2020, around noon, right before the start of the Women’s March in Bishkek, a group of unidentified masked men assaulted the peaceful demonstrators, ripped placards from their hands, tore up their banners and posters, and threw eggs at them. Participants of the March sought protection from the police, but their requests for help were ignored. Instead, the police detained around 70 peaceful protesters, forcibly dragged them into police vehicles and took them to a police station. Many of the detained suffered from bruises and arm-twisting and other injuries. Several women human rights defenders had panic attacks as a result of the assault and the violent detentions. The children of some of the detained women were left unattended on the street, as the police did not allow the women to take them to the police station. All the detained participants of the March were released on the same day.

On 10 March 2020, at least nine of the detained protesters submitted complaints to the State Committee for National Security concerning the illegal actions of the Sverdlovsk district police.

Six participants of the March are under investigation for “disobeying the lawful demand of an employee of the internal affairs bodies” under Article 82 of the Administrative Code of the Kyrgyz Republic. Among them are human rights defenders Gulyaim Aiylychi from the Bishkek Feminist Initiatives and Akmerbet Kudaybergenova from the LGBTIQ organisation Labris, as well as a lawyer, a university professor, and a journalist who are also feminist activists.

The Police department of the Sverdlovsk district has informed that there were fines issued against five men for violation of public order on 8 March.

Earlier, a court in Kyrgyzstan had banned public gatherings in the center of Bishkek until 1 July 2020, justifying it with the necessity to preserve public order and counter the threat of coronavirus. However, on 6 March 2020, the ban was lifted in the Sverdlovsk district where the Women’s March was held. The police has publicly stated that the organisers of the Women’s March had not notified the authorities about the event. However, according to the Kyrgyz Constitution, organisers of public gatherings are not obliged to notify the authorities in advance.

On 10 March 2020, a peaceful demonstration was held in Bishkek in support of those who had suffered as a result of the attack and the violent detentions during the Women’s March. Protesters demanded the resignation of the senior authorities from the Police department of the Sverdlovsk district and a thorough investigation into the attack against the Women’s March participants. While the protest on 10 March was entirely peaceful, a group of women tried to disrupt it by catching and

kicking the participants. A day before, the organisers of the protest had received online threats and their Telegram group chat had been hacked and deleted.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the attack against participants of the Women's March in Bishkek, and the violent arbitrary detentions of women human rights defenders and peaceful protesters by the police. Front Line Defenders reminds the authorities in Kyrgyzstan of their duty to uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. It further calls on the government to take immediate and impartial measures to bring those responsible for the violent attack and excessive use of force against the participants of the peaceful Women's March to justice, in accordance with international standards.

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