

Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan
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Dear Prosecutor General,

I am deeply concerned about the prosecution of journalist and blogger, Aigul Utepova, who was forcibly placed in the Centre for Psychiatric Health in Nursultan on 23 November. She has been arbitrarily accused under Article 404 part 2 of the Criminal Code (“participating in an extremist organization”) and has been under house arrest since 17 September 2020. On 19 November a court in Nursultan ruled that she should be placed in a psychiatric clinic for “observation” for two weeks.

There are no grounds to place Aigul Utepova in the Centre for Psychiatric Health. According to Kazakhstani law a suspect may be sent for psychiatric observation if accused of a crime that carries life imprisonment or the death penalty, or in cases where the suspect’s mental health is in doubt. Aigul Utepova has never been treated for a mental health condition and she explained that she recently had a full medical check after which the doctor confirmed that she was healthy.

Aigul Utepova is being prosecuted for exercising her right to freedom of expression, and consequently she is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally, and her prosecution stopped.

In the light of the above, I urge you to:

- Ensure that Aigul Utepova is released immediately and unconditionally;
- Instigate a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the circumstances of Aigul Utepova’s arbitrary prosecution, house arrest, and placement in a psychiatric institution, and ensure that anyone found responsible for violation of her rights is held to account in fair trial proceedings.

Yours sincerely,