

## **Kazakhstan: Duvanov "Beaten In Prison"**

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Jailed opposition journalist's supporters fear alleged attack was masterminded by the authorities.

Rumours that jailed opposition journalist Sergei Duvanov has been beaten up in prison appear to have been confirmed following a visit from his lawyer.

When attorney Maria Pulman met with her client in Zarechnoye prison on May 22, she noticed that his face was "bruised and grazed". Human rights activists, worried by unconfirmed reports that Duvanov had been injured, had attempted to visit him the previous day only to be turned away by prison officials.

While Duvanov refused to comment on his physical condition, a statement released by his supporters on the website [www.kub.kz](http://www.kub.kz) alleges that he was beaten up on the instructions of the Kazak authorities.

When IWPR called the prison to enquire about this, the telephone was put down on our reporter, and repeated attempts to call back failed. The interior ministry was also contacted and asked for their response to the recent developments and allegations, but they declined to comment.

His supporters claim that the incident was designed to pressure the jailed reporter into asking President Nursultan Nazarbaev for an amnesty – something that Duvanov has flatly refused to do.

Mukhtar Ablyazov, a former government official who now leads the opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, DCK, party, recently asked the president for an amnesty from his conviction on corruption charges. The authorities consented, and the DCK leader was released earlier this month. His supporters believe that Ablyazov, who has since abandoned his political activities, made the request under duress.

Duvanov's supporters now suspect that the government is using underhand tactics to force the journalist to make a similar plea. Opposition activist Nurbulat Masanov, a long-time friend of Duvanov who has spearheaded the campaign to clear his name, told IWPR that he feels the authorities now want Duvanov to write an apology or issue an admission of guilt.

"Duvanov has already been asked to apologise to the Kazak president - but he refused. He has now been beaten to put pressure on him," said Masanov.

The reporter, who was in demand across the world as an expert on Kazakhstan's human rights and press freedom record, had written a series of critical articles over the years, one of which had accused the president's circle of corruption.

He was arrested in October 2002 and charged with raping an underage girl. After a trial which was criticised by many for excluding international observers, he was pronounced guilty and sentenced to three and a half years in prison at the end of January.

Duvanov has always protested his innocence, claiming that the charges were politically motivated, and that the type of crime he was accused of was chosen specifically to alienate his international supporters.

The opposition newspaper SOLDAT has continued to publish articles by Duvanov since he was imprisoned, and also prints excerpts from letters he has written from his cell. “The people who defied the law to declare me a criminal and deprive me of my freedom will have to answer for it sooner or later,” reads one.

“I didn’t kill, steal, or rape. The people who should be punished are those who stole billions, killed our belief in justice, and violated free speech and human rights.”

DCK members believe that reports and letters such as the one quoted above are one reason why Duvanov appears to have been beaten up in prison. “Such articles have undoubtedly made the authorities nervous,” said opposition figure Pyotr Svoik.

Meanwhile, the international community is continuing to monitor the situation. Duvanov’s trial and sentence were examined at the Human Rights and Freedom in Central Asia held in Washington at the beginning of May.

Previously, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, head Jaap de Hoop Scheffer had announced that the Kazak foreign affairs ministry had agreed to allow two legal professors from the Netherlands to examine Duvanov’s trial as independent experts. The professors delivered a detailed and highly critical report into the case, which Scheffer believes will boost the campaign to free Duvanov, and allow greater scrutiny into criminal charges levied against Kazak opposition figures.

Rozlana Taukina of the public foundation Journalists in Trouble told IWPR, “We hope that the general prosecutor’s office will reverse its decision in the light of the report.”

“According to our information, the OSCE has recommended that Duvanov be released immediately and all persecution of him be stopped,” said Masanov.

The journalist’s troubles are not restricted to the physical injuries he has apparently suffered in prison. He is also facing a choice between paying state legal bills of more than 1,000 US dollars or losing his apartment.

His supporters have recently appealed to the media and international community for financial aid to ensure the journalist is not left homeless once he is eventually released.

Alexander Zakharov is the pseudonym for a journalist in Almaty

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