

Police Round Up Men After Janaozen Violence

Author: [Janar Kasymbekova](#)

Newspaper correspondent describes tense aftermath of violence in west Kazakstan oil town.

We spent two days in Janaozen. The first night, we asked for a meeting with Interior Minister Kalmuhambet Kasymov, who agreed to answer some questions.

When asked who fired the first shots, he said the police were initially equipped with non-lethal weapons, but later on the situation escalated.

“People dressed in oil workers’ uniforms” – that’s how he phrased it – began rioting, setting fire to vehicles and throwing stones at the police.

He stressed that the oil workers themselves did not display aggression; they behaved peacefully.

Then the police opened fire. “No one gave the order,” the minister said. “Each policeman was thinking of his own safety at that point. But at first they fired into the air.”

As for the woman who died in hospital of a bullet wound, reported in the press, he said that was a ricochet round.

Kasymov said that if a similar situation occurred in Aktau [city to which unrest has spread], and a crowd of unidentified people behaved in the same aggressive manner, then he would give the order to shoot at them.

As for what I saw in Janaozen, tensions have fallen there, but there are a great many OMON [riot police] on the streets. There are 20 or 30 heavily equipped OMON police in every residential district and on every street.

There are virtually no men on the street. Locals say that if any man goes out into the street, he will immediately be picked up and taken to a police station, so men are staying home. If they do have to go out, they do so in the company of two or three women.

A woman came up to us and said that her husband was detained by the OMON on December 16. He was beaten up and taken to a police station. Since then she hasn’t heard news of him. “We’re getting reports that the detainees are being tortured in the basements and forced to confess their guilt for what’s happened,” the woman said. She asked us to help rescue her husband.

We went into courtyards [of residential blocks] – there was no one around. In one of them we found a shotgun cartridge, and some local women confirmed there had been shooting there.

We were taken to the town’s police station. We went up to the fourth floor and saw men lined up against a wall, their hands behind their heads. There were about 20 of them aged 30 to 40. Half of them had been beaten up.

We managed to talk to one of them – he said he worked for a mobile phone company and wasn’t involved in the protests. He said they were rounding up men indiscriminately.

When we asked Kasymov why these people had been detained, he said they had been gathering in groups of two or three and walking in the streets, many of them with no ID on them even though a state of emergency was in place. That was why they were all being taken to the police station.

The women we spoke to in Janaozen were crying and complaining that they’d had no bread or milk for four days, and nothing to feed their children.

Food prices have shot up. Eggs now cost 300 tenge, about two US dollars, each. But anyway, there’s no food in the shops. People are going hungry.

People in Janaozen are very angry. Local residents don’t blame the oil workers as they don’t believe it was they who mounted an attack.

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