



Dignity Network Canada Stands with Zhanar Sekerbayeva

Dignity Network Canada is alarmed by the decision of Kazakhstani authorities to proceed with criminal charges against human rights defender and feminist activist Zhanar Sekerbayeva, a valued member of our Global Advisory Board.

Zhanar is unfairly and unusually charged under Article 109(1) of Kazakhstan's Criminal Code ('Battery') following incidents in which an anti-LGBTIQ+ provocateur repeatedly disrupted peaceful community gatherings, recorded participants without consent, and filed complaints against activists. That the government has chosen to pursue criminal proceedings against Zhanar, rather than address the harassment that preceded them, sends a troubling signal about whose safety the law is being mobilized to protect.

Zhanar's work as a community organizer and advocate has long brought people together across issues of equality and social justice: hers is the kind of voice that authoritarian pressure seeks to silence. Zhanar has been targeted before, demonstrating a pattern of persecution towards activists advocating for equality. In February **2024**, she was arrested and served 10 days of administrative detention under Article 488, Part 7 of the Kazakh Administrative Code, which penalizes alleged violations of public assembly regulations. In **2021**, Zhanar and a colleague were verbally and physically attacked by a group of men protesting a women's rights meeting, among them police officers. The two activists were arrested, while the police officers never faced investigation.

In speaking directly with Zhanar about her experience and the motivations driving these proceedings, she stated:

"...our government wants to punish me for my 11-years LGBTQI+ activism in the Kazakhstan Feminist Initiative 'Feminita'. The Police, Committee of National Security, and the Prosecutor's office in Astana should work on cases of femicide, corruption, fraud – not to prosecute and punish a Kazakh lesbian 42-year old woman who is so brave and vocal, that they had to fabricate a case to stop me. Well, I will not stop and will continue feminist activism defending women's rights! My heart is with all LGBTQI+ people in Central Asia and the world."



Zhanar's case is not isolated: across Central Asia and beyond, LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders are increasingly encountering legal and administrative tools wielded as instruments of suppression. This pattern has been documented alongside Pride bans, 'extremism' prosecutions, and coordinated harassment campaigns targeting civil society. Just weeks before these proceedings advanced, President Tokayev signed into law a ban on information deemed to promote 'non-traditional sexual orientation', a piece of legislation that replicates Russia's 2013 'gay propaganda' law. The charges against Zhanar are an early consequence of a legislative environment expressly designed to criminalise LGBTIQ+ visibility, and they must be understood as such.

Dignity Network Canada (DNC) works alongside coalitions and networks globally, guided by the principle that international solidarity is not optional; it is one of the few tools available to activists operating in hostile environments. Zhanar has asked that attention be drawn to her case, and we honour that request. We echo statements made by [ILGA Europe](#) and [EL*C](#), and call on Kazakhstani authorities to safeguard due process, ensure that all filed complaints are investigated impartially, and uphold the rights and safety of LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders.

DNC will continue to work with and encourage the Canadian government to monitor and raise the issue of Zhanar's case through appropriate diplomatic channels and to continue to stand firmly for the protection of human rights defenders worldwide.

We stand in solidarity with Zhanar and broader LGBTIQ+ communities in Kazakhstan.

