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Kyrgyzstan: Human rights defender and lawyer Samat Matsakov arrested and detained

On 30 November 2024, Pervomaiskii District Court of the City of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, ruled to place human rights defender and lawyer **Samat Matsakov** in the Pre-Trial Detention Center of the State Committee for National Security until 30 December 2024. The previous day, on 29 November 2024, law enforcement officers raided the human rights defender's apartment, before arresting and detaining him. He has been accused of fraud on a large scale (Part 3 of the Article 209 of the Criminal Code of Kyrgyzstan) and forgery of documents (Part 3 of the Article 379 of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyzstan). Samat Matsakov and his lawyers maintain his innocence, arguing that this persecution is a result of the human rights defender's work as a lawyer on a number of high-profile cases, including alleged cases of torture by state agents.

[Samat Matsakov](#) is a Kyrgyzstani human rights defender and lawyer. Licensed to practice criminal law, he acts as a defence attorney, focusing on freedom of speech restrictions and working against the state-administered mass prosecution of those charged with "calls for mass civic unrest." He has defended human rights defenders and whistle-blowers [Zhoomart Karabaev](#) and akyn Askat Zhetigen, and was part of a collective defense for the human rights defenders and journalists from the investigative media outlet Temirov Live. Samat Matsakov has also worked on high-profile cases of alleged torture administered by the State Committee for National Security.

On 30 November 2024, the Pervomaiskii District Court of the City of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan ruled to place human rights defender and lawyer Samat Matsakov in pre-trial detention until 30 December 2024. The previous day, on November 29 2024, law enforcement officers raided the human rights defender's apartment, arrested and detained him. During the raid, the authorities seized recordings – DVD discs and voice recordings – related to one of the high profile human rights cases Samat Matsakov has been working on recently. After the raid, the authorities brought the human rights defender to the State Committee for National Security for questioning. During the questioning, the authorities refused access to the ten lawyers who arrived to provide legal representation for Samat Matsakov.

In the late evening of 29 November 2024, law enforcement officers brought Samat Matsakov to the Pervomaiskii District Court of the City of Bishkek where the Court hearing started at 11.30 pm. Approximately 50 Kyrgyzstani human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists arrived to observe the trial and demanded that the Court hold a hearing in a venue that could accommodate all of the trial observers, which the Court agreed to do. The hearing continued during the night until approximately 9 am, 30 November 2024. The Court revealed for the first time during the trial that Samat Matsakov was accused of large-scale fraud (Part 3 of the Article 209 of the Criminal Code of Kyrgyzstan) and document forgery (Part 3 of the Article 379 of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyzstan) for allegedly forging an agreement with a principal. The human rights defender denies any wrongdoing and has reported experiencing severe psychological pressure in the courtroom, during the raid, and during the questioning, particularly with the limited access to legal representation

The trial observers reported a number of procedural violations, including the Court's repeated denial of Samat Matsakov's lawyers to access critical evidence such as documentation which the prosecutor alleged confirmed the human rights defender's guilt, on the basis that these documents were classified. The evidence consisted of a copy of an agreement with the plaintiff that the human rights defender is accused of forging. Moreover, the prosecutor failed to present any complaints on the side of the principal regarding the alleged forgery.

Front Line Defenders condemns the prosecution of human rights defender and lawyer Samat Matsakov as it believes he is being targeted for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. The blatant targeting of Samat Matsakov challenges the principles and the independence of the Bar Association in Kyrgyzstan, as it threatens the institution of legal protection and the ability of lawyers to protect their defendants without fear of prosecution. Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern regarding the increased silencing of human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists in Kyrgyzstan which has a chilling effect on civil society in the country. The targeting of human rights defenders and lawyers by agents of the state forms part of a worrying trend that includes judicial harassment and has contributed to the continued shrinking of civil society space.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to:

1. Immediately release human rights defender and lawyer Samat Matsakov and drop all charges against him as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defense of human rights;
2. Ensure that all necessary measures are taken to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Samat Matsakov;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders and lawyers in Kyrgyzstan can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.