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FREEDOM NOW

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INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST RAMAZAN YESERGEPOV RELEASED FROM PRISON IN KAZAKHSTAN

Washington, D.C.: The Kazakh government released Ramazan Yesergepov, the Chief Editor and founder of the Alma-Ata Info newspaper, from his imprisonment today. The government has wrongfully detained Mr. Yesergepov since January 2009 on charges of collection and publication of state secrets.

“We are relieved that the Kazakh government is finally releasing Mr. Yesergepov from his unjust imprisonment, albeit at the end of his sentence,” said Freedom Now’s Executive Director Maran Turner. “However, in addition to a three year prison sentence, Mr. Yesergepov will now be subject to two years suspension from journalism which only further violates his right to freedom of expression.”

Prior to his arrest, Mr. Yesergepov was a leading investigative journalist in Kazakhstan. As the Chief Editor of Alma-Ata Info newspaper, Mr. Yesergepov sought to raise awareness of public corruption.

In January 2009, Kazakh security service agents arrested Mr. Yesergepov and charged him with the collection and publication of state secrets in the Alma-Ata Info after he published an article asserting that a regional security official has sought to influence a local prosecutor and judge in a criminal tax evasion case. In the article, Mr. Yesergepov published a memo that he received anonymously in his home from an anonymous source that according to the article exposed corruption in the Kazakh government.

In a trial that violated international standards, Mr. Yesergepov was convicted and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment and an additional two years suspension from journalism. Additionally, Kazakh authorities shut down the Alma-Ata Info. In detention, Mr. Yesergepov was repeatedly denied adequate medical treatment despite his history of hypertension.

Although released three years after his arrest, experts confirm that Mr. Yesergepov should have been released yesterday, January 5. Like the repeated denial of his requests for parole, such actions shed light on the government’s true motives for Mr. Yesergepov’s detention.

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Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.