



Joint situation note

INPUT INTO THE EU-KYRGYZSTAN HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE IN A CONTEXT OF A RAPIDLY DETERIORATING SITUATION

23 May 2017

Ahead of the Presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan scheduled for Autumn 2017, persecution of human rights defenders, journalists and opposition members severely intensified.

FIDH and its member organisations in Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Movement *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan*, Human Rights Protection Centre *Kylым Shamy* and Legal Clinic *Adilet* consider the upcoming EU-Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Dialogue on 27 June 2017 in Brussels as a key opportunity for the EU to bring forward recommendations to the Kyrgyz authorities that are crucial for a conducive and peaceful electoral environment and a seamless power change.

Unfortunately, recent developments in the country give a cause for caution in terms of the stability of the political situation and the consequences of reprisals against independent media and government critics. As it was alerted in our last report¹, harassment of non-governmental organisations and the independent media not only became common but continues to grow.

The constitutional referendum conducted in December 2016 approved amendments that may be considered to be favouring negative attitudes towards groups defending the rights of individuals, especially those advocating for LGBTI, women's and minorities' rights and groups that use international instruments to seek compensation for human rights violations².

The amendments have reduced the independence of the judiciary, strengthened the executive branch and curtailed the constitutional oversight of the executive and the legislature rendering the Constitutional Court unable to make independent decisions on anti-constitutional nature of laws³.

The fact that in Article 1 of the Constitution, the reference to universally accepted human rights was replaced by vague "highest values"⁴, that now "serve as a basis for laws and other normative

¹ *Kyrgyzstan at a crossroads: shrink or widen the scene for human rights defenders*, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders", June 2016, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/kyrgyzstanobsang2016web.pdf>

² For instance, the new Constitution recognises as family only a union of a man and a woman, thus discriminating unmarried and LGBTI couples as well as single mothers. The reference to "childhood, fatherhood, motherhood" in the amended Article 1 on the "highest values" has a potential of perpetuation of gender stereotypes including limiting women's roles to being wives and mothers. The vague "highest value" of "morality" may be used to restrict and penalise roles, behaviors and attitudes that are considered to be "immoral". For more information, see Preliminary Joint Opinion on the draft law "On introduction of amendments and changes to the Constitution", 29 August 2016, [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI\(2016\)009-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2016)009-e).

³ Ibid.

⁴ These include "pursuit of happiness", "love for the motherland", "honour and dignity", "unity of the people of the Kyrgyz Republic", "peace and accord in the country", "preservation and development of language and national culture", "careful attitude to history", "morality", "family, childhood, fatherhood, motherhood", "combination of

regulatory acts", may undermine the significance and status of human rights and freedoms in the Kyrgyz Republic's legal order. Moreover, the new Constitution also removed the reference to the priority of international human rights treaties over other international treaties that means that the former are no longer be recognised internally as having precedence over other treaties in case of contradiction.

Below are the recent examples of the rapidly deteriorating situation in Kyrgyzstan that needs to be urgently addressed during the upcoming EU-Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Dialogue in a form of recommendations to the Kyrgyz authorities presented in the present document.

The EU-funded programmes *Strengthening democracy through electoral reforms* and *Promotion of Rule of Law in Kyrgyz Republic* are levers for change ahead of a crucial power transition in a country of strategic regional importance. As are the other EU instruments like the Human rights diplomacy and the unilateral trade preferences.

1. Attacks on the freedom of speech

The attacks on independent media, that began a few years ago⁵, intensified since the beginning of 2017 in the context of approaching Presidential elections. On 11 March 2017, the official website of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic published a statement by the head of state claiming that "a small group of allegedly independent journalists, mass media and politicians <...> smear people they dislike..., and first of all... the President" hereby trying "to destabilise the situation before the Presidential elections".

The statement presumably made reference to two lawsuits filed by that time against independent Internet media portals under the Law *On Guarantees of the Activities of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic* (18 July 2003, No. 152). Article 4 of the Law *Protection of the honour and dignity of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic* vaguely prescribes that the office of the Prosecutor General is charged with defence of the honour and dignity of the President by filing lawsuits and representing the President in courts. No precision is given in the law as to what defines an insult and what evidence is sufficient to prove an insult to President's honour and dignity.

Thus, on 6 March 2017, the Prosecutor General filed two lawsuits against independent Internet portals **Zanoza** (and its co-founder and journalist Narynbek Idinov, known under pseudonym **Naryn Aiyp**) and **Azattyk** accusing them of insulting the dignity and honour of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. One lawsuit pertains to covering a press conference, organised on 1 March 2017 by lawyers of the opposition party Ata-Meken⁶, and to an article translated from a Turkish mass medium Haberler with a comment by the leader of Ata-Meken O. Tekebayev. The latter politician was arrested on 26 February 2017 and charged with corruption and fraud.

In the second lawsuit, the Prosecutor General accuses **Zanoza** and **Azattyk** of insulting the President's honour and dignity in an article published on 13 February 2017 titled *Tekebayev told who he met on Cyprus and where else he will go*⁷. If the lawsuits are lost by the defendants, Zanoza

traditions and progress".

⁵ See Chapter "The weakening of the media", p. 13 of the report "Kyrgyzstan at a crossroads: shrink or widen the scene for human rights defenders", Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders", June 2016, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/kyrgyzstanobsang2016web.pdf>

⁶ During the press conference, the lawyers of "Ata Meken" presented to the public documents allegedly proving that the plane Boeing 747 from Istanbul that crashed in a village of Dachi-Su in Kyrgyzstan on 16 January 2017 causing 39 deaths carried freight that included precious metals and stones belonging to A. Almazbek and his wife. This information was later refuted by the Embassy of Turkey in Kyrgyzstan.

⁷ The article published at "Zanoza" at http://zanoza.kg/doc/352446_tekebaev_rasskazal_s_kem_vstrechalsia_na_kipre, partially available at

and Azattyk shall pay 26 million Kyrgyz soms for reputation damage: 20 million is requested from Azattyk and 6 million from Zanoza (268 500 euros and 80 500 euros respectively).

A few days later, on 9 March 2017, the President's political party, the Social Democrats, filed a lawsuit against the author of the article *The ruling party was shown teeth in the country's regions*⁸ **Rita Karasartova** and the online information agency **24.kg** that published it. The article reports on the fact that members of local municipality councils refuse to vote for ruling party candidates to mayor position. The ruling party claims 1 million soms (13 400 euros) from each defendant for the damage caused to the party's reputation.

On 16 March 2017, it was reported that yet another lawsuit was filed by the Prosecutor General against the Internet website **Zanoza** and its co-founder and journalist **Naryn Aiyp** for insulting the honour and dignity of the President in an article published in October 2015 titled *Millions from the President: who in fact financed the banquet*⁹. 3 000 000 soms, or 40 300 euros, are being requested as monetary compensation for moral damages.

On 31 March 2017, the Prosecutor General filed the fourth lawsuit protecting the honour and dignity of the President against **Zanoza** and its co-founder and journalist **Naryn Aiyp** for his article *Lies in the name of a quasi-salvation: a puppet show of the independence*¹⁰. 6 million som, or 80 600 euros, are requested from both defendants as a compensation for damage.

Despite the fact that the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic Kubat Otorbaev appealed to the senior government officials of the country to urgently withdraw their claims against independent mass media, the accounts of the media outlets under attack - Azattyk and Zanoza - were frozen on 14 March 2017 by the Lenin district court of Bishkek.

By 12 May 2017, the claims of just satisfaction submitted against Azattyk amounted to 268 000 euros, against Zanoza - 364 000 euros. Lawsuits against Zanoza journalist Naryn Aiyp demand compensation in the amount of .12 million soms, or 161 000 euros. His assets have been frozen and he is prohibited from leaving the country.

On 12 May 2017, the lawsuits against Azattyk, the Kyrgyz radio service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, were withdrawn after the visit that the chief executive of Radio Liberty Thomas Kent paid to the President of Kyrgyzstan A. Atambaev. Our organisations pursue that the withdrawal of claims against Azattyk demonstrate the political character and selective approach of the prosecution against independent Internet media sources.

The latter examples demonstrate the scale of the assault on the independent media exercising the legitimate and internationally protected right to information and freedom of expression, the hallmark of a democratic and pluralistic political system. The government of Kyrgyzstan needs to be reminded that the freedom of expression is first and foremost the right to criticise the authorities and to express political views.

The EU should urge and help the Kyrgyz authorities to:

- Immediately stop attacks on independent media. The EU should insist that it considers a free and open media environment a *sine qua non* condition for free and fair elections.

http://www.gezitter.org/ushaktar/57781_tekebaev_vstretilsya_s_kurmanbekom_bakievym_na_kipre/.

⁸ https://24.kg/vlast/44643_regionyi_kyirgyzstana_pokazali_zubyi_partii_vlasti/

⁹ The article on zanoza.kg has been removed. The article is available at <http://ferghana-blog.livejournal.com/289130.html>.

¹⁰ The article (in Russian: "Ложь якобы во спасение: паппет-шоу независимости") was removed from Zanoza.kg and it no longer available.

- End the instrumentation of justice against media, including Internet portals and journalists. The EU should demand the withdrawal of lawsuits against the Internet portal “Zanoza”, human rights activists Cholpon Djakupova (for more details, see below) and Rita Karasartova and journalist Naryn Aiyp. The EU should insist that the bank accounts of Azattyk and Zanoza be unfrozen.
- Support the work of the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic. s
- Comply with the resolution of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan *On the judicial practice in resolving disputes on the protection of honour, dignity and business reputation*. In particular, the resolution establishes that "public officials can be criticised in the media with respect to the exercise their public functions" and that "humoristic and satyric styles allow for a great degree of exaggeration and even provocation, if no false facts are communicated".
- Bring the Kyrgyz legislation concerning the protection of the President (*Law On Guarantees of the Activities of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic* (18 July 2003, No. 152) in line with the international standards of freedom of expression. The EU should offer technical support, through the work of the Venice Commission, and insist that it considers the repeal, or, as a minimum, a review of the latter legislation an important benchmark since it contains serious flaws:
 - The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic does not empower the Prosecutor General with an authority to protect the honour and dignity of the President. Hereby the law *On Guarantees of the Activities of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic* prescribes broader powers for the Prosecutor General as established in the Constitution.
 - The law neither provides a clear legal definition of, nor clarifies what evidence is sufficient to prove an "insult the honour and dignity of the President of Kyrgyz Republic".
 - The law does not establish any limits with regard to fine amounts in civil cases for insulting the honour and dignity of the President of Kyrgyz Republic.
 - The law does not contain additional measures of guarantees to the freedom of expression, for instance, by requiring the plaintiff to prove both, the falsity of the relevant statements and the authors' "malicious intent" of the defendant.
- Bring the national legislation regulating defamation (article 329 of the Criminal Code "On false accusation made knowingly" adopted in May 2014) in line with the international standards of freedom of expression. The latter law prescribes up to three years in prison for falsely and publicly accusing a person of committing a crime. In practice, the article re-criminalises defamation that was de-criminalised in 2011. Since criminal defamation is acknowledged by the UN human rights mechanisms as an unjustifiable restriction on freedom of expression, all criminal laws on defamation should be abolished and replaced, where necessary, with appropriate civil defamation laws. In the past, the UN Human Rights Committee¹¹ has already expressed concerns with regards to the use of defamation in Kyrgyzstan against journalists who criticize the Government incompatible with the freedom of expression and of the press¹².
- Call on Kyrgyzstan to initiate legislative changes to ensure the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, online as well as offline as the EU committed in its dedicate guidelines.

¹¹ UN Human Rights Committee is in charge of overseeing the respect of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

¹² UN Human Rights Committee, Sixty-ninth session, Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee, CCPR/CO/69/KGZ, 24 July 2000, <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsspZJCN1mf3WxJr5cyTnAFMr%2bNUMbIPO2IqS6xuNLX7zCsfaB%2b5npRG8HGxk233SVfWBDS3rkF0eg2UR5xSxeRKIrHXyZaDNWnSyYzw3%2fmyh>

2. Attacks on human rights defenders

While independent media are the first target of any attempt to encroach on freedom of expression and the right to information, NGOs, rights groups and human rights defenders form a so-called "parallel target" as a sanction for their watchdog role and for the legal assistance they provide.

On 20 April 2017, the Prosecutor General filed a lawsuit against **Cholpon Djakupova**, former MP and currently head of the legal clinic *Adilet*¹³ that provides legal assistance to human rights activists and journalists prosecuted for insulting the honour and dignity of the President of Kyrgyzstan. In December 2016, Cholpon Djakupova resigned from her position as MP hereby losing her parliamentary immunity, in protest to recent amendments made to the Constitution. Cholpon Djakupova also severely criticised the President for his role in organising the referendum on constitutional amendments that according to local and international experts negatively affected the democratic principles and the state of human rights in Kyrgyzstan.

Cholpon Djakupova is being accused of insulting the honour and dignity of the Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev in her speech delivered on 30 March 2017. During a round table on freedom of speech organised by the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic, she strongly criticised Almazbek Atambaev, warning that his policies may drag the country into a civil war. She repeated her criticism as to the President's role in adopting the Constitutional amendments and denounced the lawsuits filed against media outlets. The President was also criticized for his promises to donate to children with cancer the money he would supposedly win from the lawsuits filed against the media.¹⁴ Cholpon Djakupova considered such statements to be against the principle of the independence of the judiciary.

The Prosecutor imputes to Cholpon Djakupova that her speech included "emotionally-expressive elements, irony and sarcasm. Lexico-semantic and contextual analysis demonstrated that the speech includes negative information. Words and expressions are used with an aim to create a negative public opinion about the President".

The claim of just satisfaction for the damage caused to the President amounts to 44,700 US dollars from each defendant. Other defendants in the case are Internet website **Zanoza**, its chief editor **Dina Maslova** and its journalist **Naryn Aiyp** - all brought the same charges for covering Cholpon Djakupova's speech.

The lawsuit served as a basis for the Oktyabsky District Court decision to order on 26 April 2017 a seizure of a cottage house belonging to Cholpon Djakupova worth 50 000 US dollars. Moreover, Cholpon Djakupova together with Dina Maslova and Naryn Aiyp are formally prohibited from leaving the country. In violation of the procedural norms, the latter court decisions were made without notifying the defendants who were neither informed about the opening of the case against them. On 18 May 2017, the Bishkek City Court upheld the decision of the Oktyabrsky District Court to seize property of the three defendants and ban them from travel.

We would like to draw the attention to the fact that none of the legal arguments presented by Cholpon Djakupova and her lawyers as to the groundlessness of the travel ban were taken into account by the judge. Although the clause 8 of the article 46 of the Law of KR *On external migration* allows an imposition of a travel ban against a defendant in a civil case, the latter norm contradicts the Constitution and the Code of Civil Procedure of the Kyrgyz Republic that ensure freedom of movement and a right to be represented in court through legal counsel. The law *On*

¹³ Legal Clinic Adilet provides legal services/protection to number independent journalists/media as well as human rights defenders. Ms. Cholpon Djakupova is the former Member of the Kyrgyz Parliament who criticized the Kyrgyz President Mr. Almazbek Atambaev. After resigning she became the victim of political pressure.

¹⁴ <https://centre1.com/kyrgyzstan/v-kyrgyzstane-ocherednoj-isk-protiv-zhurnalistov-v-zashhitu-prezidenta/>

external migration hereby also violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that ensures the right to leave any country, including his or her own, except in cases provided by law necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others.

Since the lawsuit against Cholpon Djakupova does not fall in any of the latter categories, and since her real estate seizure ensures payment of compensation in case of a successful claim by the Prosecutor General, our organisations view the travel ban against her as an additional form of harassment aimed at sanctioning her critical stance towards the President.

In the meantime, verbal attacks against human rights defenders and independent media, including the President himself through his public speeches, go unpunished and contribute to a negative discourse towards rights groups reigning in the pro-government media. On 19 May 2016, **Tolekan Ismailova (Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan)** and **Aziza Abdirasulova (Kylym Shamy)** filed a lawsuit against the President of the Kyrgyz Republic in relation to a public speech delivered by A. Atambaev. On 14 May 2016, a day celebrated as Mothers' Day in Kyrgyzstan, the President mentioned the names of prominent human rights defenders along with the names of the alleged organisers of a political upheaval and promised to ruthlessly suppress any attempts to destabilise the country.

On 16 June 2016, Pervomaiskii District Court dismissed the lawsuit and the case was lost in appeal on 7 September 2016 in Bishkek City Court . On 22 May 2017, the ruling concerning Tolekan Ismailova was upheld in Supreme Court. Aziza Abdirasulova has not yet filed a supervisory review procedure before the Supreme Court.

Beside being targeted in slanderous comments by the President and defamatory articles in pro-government media, *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* team and head of *Kylym Shamy* Aziza Abdirasulova have been victims of illegal surveillance by the security services on the occasion of the retrial in appeal of human rights defender Azimjan Askarov. In addition to these attacks, *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* was recently subject to defamation by the State Committee on National Security (SCNS). On 24 January 2017, the SCNS disseminated a press release which accused representatives of *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* of having tried to prevent an arrest of an individual suspected of extremism on 19 January 2017. No representative of *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* was in fact present at the scene of the arrest. Therefore, on 13 February 2017, *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* filed a lawsuit against the SCNS to seek protection of their "honour, dignity and business reputation" under the law.

The defamatory press release was published by the SCNS on 24 January 2017 - the day of the announcement of the verdict in the case of human rights defender **Azimjan Askarov** whose life sentence was upheld after a mock retrial in appeal¹⁵.

The EU should urge the Kyrgyz authorities to:

- Withdraw the lawsuit against Cholpon Djakupova and repeal the travel bans against her and against journalists Dina Maslova and Naryn Aiyp.
- Comply with the national law, prescribing procedures of due information of defendants in civil cases, including their notification of charges brought against them and acquaintance with case materials.
- Ensure the equality of arms in civil cases on the protection of honour, dignity and business reputation.

¹⁵ Kyrgyzstan tramples upon its human rights commitments and maintains Askarov in jail, Press release, 24 January 2017, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/kyrgyzstan-tramples-upon-its-human-rights-commitments-and-maintains>

- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders and put an end to any kind of harassment - including at the judicial level - against them.
- Abolish excessive control and unjustified interference with NGO activities, as well as intimidation and persecution of people and groups working with issues of human rights.
- Pay attention to the "hate speech" openly used in mass media, TV and radio against NGOs, human rights organisations and human rights defenders.
- Fully implement the decisions and recommendations of United Nations (UN) treaty bodies and in particular the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee in the case of human rights defender Azimjan Askarov (UN CCPR Views concerning communication No. 2231/2012). The UN recommendations having been ignored by the Kyrgyz authorities since the beginning of his retrial in appeal¹⁶, Azimjan Askarov must be immediately released and provided with legal and medical rehabilitation.
- Undertake a full, effective and independent investigation into the claims of torture made by Azimjan Askarov and by six defence witnesses heard by the Chuy Regional Court on November 1, 2016 who during a retrial in appeal of Azimjan Askarov. The witnesses claimed having been tortured to force them to testify against Azimjan Askarov¹⁷.
- Undertake a full, effective and independent investigation into the claims of surveillance against *Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan* team, against Aziza Abdirasulova and Azimjan Askarov's defence team.
- Immediately schedule a visit with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association.

3. Violation of the right to legal defence

Provision of legal aid is severely hampered in Kyrgyzstan. The physical and psychological integrity of lawyers and NGOs providing legal aid is at risk, especially in judicial cases against representatives of national minorities, cases involving torture or threats thereof, individuals charged with extremism-related crimes or other sensitive cases, such as rape.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders has already reported on a number of attacks on lawyers in court rooms that remain not investigated¹⁸. In the majority of cases, such attacks occur in the country's south during trials against Uzbek minority defendants.

The present document draws the attention of the EU to the most recent incident of physical assault on lawyers in Osh city and to the inaction of the authorities.

On 28 April 2017, defendant Nargiz Radjapova and her lawyers - Aisalkin Karabaeva and Mukhaie Abduraupova - were physically attacked and beaten in the court room of Osh City Court. It was reported that the police, alerted of the incident, did not come to the crime scene. No measures are known to have been taken so far to investigate the incident and bring those responsible to justice.

Nargiz Radjapova claims to have been tortured by the police and denied access to lawyers on 24-26 March 2017. No investigation of the claims of torture is known to have been taken place to date.

¹⁶ See the report of the Observatory (FIDH-OMCT) "Life sentence against human rights defender Azimjan Askarov confirmed in contradiction with UN body recommendations", <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/kyrgyzstanobsang2017bassdef.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Kyrgyzstan at a crossroads: shrink or widen the scene for human rights defenders", Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders", June 2016, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/kyrgyzstanobsang2016web.pdf>

In the latter instance, claims of torture, attacks on lawyers and the defendant and inaction of the court demonstrate the lack of judicial reforms in Kyrgyzstan that would allow ensuring the rule of law and a fair administration of justice.

In 2010, the trial against human rights defender **Azimjan Askarov** charged with a complicity in a murder of a police officer was marked by the same grave violations of the standards of fair trial that the authorities of the Kyrgyz Republic refuse to remedy to date.

The EU should urge the Kyrgyz authorities to:

- Comply with the domestic law protecting the physical integrity of lawyers and their independence.
- Ensure due and impartial investigation of the facts of physical attacks on lawyers and bring those responsible to justice.
- Ensure due and impartial investigation of claims of torture and implement the national norms prohibiting the admissibility in Courts of confessions used under torture.
- Take concrete measures to address discrimination in access to justice and equality of arms concerning members of minorities, in particular Uzbek minority defendants. The EU should accompany a strong political messaging with an offer for technical aid and support for projects in that direction under the Rule of Law priority it has proposed to Kyrgyzstan.

FIDH and its member organisations wish to reiterate their call for the EU to comply with its own commitment to use all the instruments at its disposal to consolidate human rights and to put special emphasis on the coordination, close involvement and regular consultation with the civil society. In that regard, we ask the EU to:

- Use the human rights dialogue and GSP+ dedicated dialogue to foster progress and to clarify how the EU intends to encourage and support actions expected from the Kyrgyz authorities to implement the above-mentioned recommendations;
- Clarify the timeline and benchmarks for the implementation of the programmes *Promotion of Rule of Law in Kyrgyz Republic* and *Strengthening democracy through electoral reforms* to ensure the priorities are duly addressed and the results effectively monitored. Involve the civil society and human rights organisations into the elaboration of this dedicated roadmap and its assessment;
- Ensure a broad involvement of civil society that go beyond preparation and follow-up of the human rights dialogue. For example, ensure that civil society is consulted ahead of the political dialogue as well as sectoral cooperation (in particular in the areas of migration, border management, electoral reform, the fight against terrorism, security and drug trafficking), areas for which the EU should ensure that human rights safeguards are systematically mainstreamed;
- Support the independent civil society in order to lead to its effective protection and to the reinforcement of its right to participation in public affairs (capacity to hold public authorities accountable, to take part in the national decision making processes, to monitor the implementation of public policies).

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