

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/kazakhstan-second-opposition-journalist-10-08-2012,43206.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Kazakhstan

Wanton cruelty

Second opposition journalist suffers attempt on his life

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Reporters Without Borders is outraged by the attempt two days ago on the life of Kazakh journalist **Ularbek Baitailak**, an archivist and reporter for several opposition newspapers.

"We have just [awarded the Peter Mackler prize to Lukpan Akmedyarov](#), who was [violently attacked](#) less than four months ago, and now another opposition journalist has been the victim of a similar attack," the press freedom organization said.

"Despite the theft of his personal possessions, Ularbek Baitailak's profile and the method used by his attackers indicate the reasons behind the attack were work-related and political. We urge the police and Astana public prosecutor to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation, focusing on the journalist's work.

"Once again, the deterioration in conditions for independent and opposition journalists in Kazakhstan has reached a critical point. They have come to expect censorship, [arrest](#) and intimidation. However, the frequency and seriousness of attacks has been growing month by month.

"Given the [current tension](#) in the country, we call on the authorities to return to the path of dialogue and conciliation, which necessarily involves freedom of information and firm action to put an end to the impunity of those who attack media workers, trade unionists and opposition supporters."

Baitailak was attacked around midnight on 7 August near his home in the suburbs of the Kazakh capital, Astana. Colleagues who have visited him in hospital have told Reporters Without Borders that four men approached him from behind and hit him violently on the head. As he was getting up, he was shot at close range, probably by an air pistol, then kicked.

He tried to resist but lost consciousness and his attackers left him for dead at the edge of the road after covering his body with stones as a symbolic burial. They stole his suit, the documents he was carrying and his cell phone, as well as 50,000 tenge (approx. 270 euros) in cash.

Baitailak was taken the next day to the trauma and orthopaedic centre in Astana where doctors said he had suffered a severe head injury, a deep chest wound, a split lip and several broken teeth. Further tests are being carried out to determine the extent of any internal injuries. He also suffered widespread bruising all over his body. He is unable to move around without help and will have to spend at least a month in hospital.

Baitailak works for the National Archives and contributes regularly to Kazakh-language newspapers *DAT* and *Tortinshi Bilik (Fourth Estate)* and the magazine *Altyn Tamyр*, all of which are close to the opposition. His articles are often highly critical of the authorities, in particular by making historical comparisons to point out the authoritarianism of the present government.

[Kazakhstan](#) is ranked 154th of 179 countries in the [2011-2012 World Press Freedom Index](#) compiled by Reporters Without Borders. From this year, it also [included among countries "under surveillance"](#) in the list of Internet Enemies published by the organization.

(Picture: Zangar Karimkhan)

