

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/kazakhstan-journalist-missing-after-25-12-2012,43832.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Kazakhstan

Unacceptable hoax

"Missing" journalist reappears, but freedom of information doesn't

7 January 2013

Reporters Without Borders is relieved that the journalist **Tokbergen Abiyev** has "reappeared" after causing much concern by going missing on 20 December (see below) but is appalled to learn that he irresponsibly staged this disappearance to make people think he had been kidnapped.

"This episode would be laughable if the situation of freedom of information in Kazakhstan were not so serious," Reporters Without Borders said. "The last thing the country's journalists needed at this critical juncture was to be discredited by an unacceptable hoax by a member of their own profession.

"While we hail the work of the police in this case, we are still awaiting convincing results in the investigations into [Oralgaisha Omarshanova](#)'s real disappearance in 2007 and last year's attempted murders of [Lukpan Akhmedyarov](#) and [Ularbek Baitailak](#)."

Reporters Without Borders added: "Abiyev's ill-conceived stunt must not deflect attention from [the current unprecedented crackdown on Kazakhstan's independent and opposition media](#). They have more need than ever of the international community's support."

Abiyev caused a stir in Kazakhstan and abroad by going missing on 20 December shortly after announcing that he would make important revelations at a news conference the next day. The police launched a major search for him and finally found him hiding in an apartment he had rented in Astana. No one was holding him against his will.

At a news conference he gave on 4 January, he said he had staged his abduction in order to draw the attention of both the public and government to his fight against corruption. He explained that he had rented the apartment in advance specially for this purpose, and had planned to spend a month there before announcing that he was safe and sound.

He added that he had hoped to obtain an interview with President Nursultan Nazarbayev after resurfacing. Although criticized by his colleagues, he claimed that he did not regret doing what he did.

25.12.2012 - Journalist missing after announcing intent to shed light on corruption

Reporters Without Borders is very worried about **Tokbergen Abiyev**, a journalist who went missing in the Kazakh capital of Astana on 20 December shortly after announcing that he would reveal important facts about corruption at a news conference the next day. Abiyev heads the "Zakon i Pravosudie" (Law and Justice) Media Alliance and is the former editor of a newspaper of the same name. He is also the founder and editor of the *Abiyev.kz* news website.

"There is little doubt that Abiyev's disappearance is linked to the news conference he had planned to give the next day," Reporters Without Borders said. "We urge the Kazakh authorities to carry out a rapid investigation and do everything possible to locate him. The probability that his disappearance is linked to his work as a journalist must be taken seriously by the police in charge of the case, who must guarantee the impartiality of their investigation.

Abiyev's life may be at risk and every second counts."

After returning to his office at around 9 p.m. on 20 December, Abiyev went out again about an hour later saying he was going to get information for the next day's news conference and would return soon, fellow journalist **Andrey Taranov** said. He has not been seen since and did not answer any of the calls that his colleagues began making to him shortly after midnight.

In an email he sent to Astana-based journalists earlier in the day, Abiyev wrote: "Dear Colleagues, Tomorrow, 21 December (...) an exclusive news conference will be held [with the title of] 'A corrupt person must go to prison.' You will not be disappointed. Your presence is expected." The email also said that the news conference would be about "the Astana government's corruption and despotism."

Abiyev's wife reported his disappearance to the Astana police on 22 December. A message was also sent to the National Security Committee (KNB). The police say they are currently conducting preliminary enquiries.

Abiyev was released from prison last May on completing the three-year sentence he received in 2008, when he was *Zakon i Pravosudie*'s editor. He was convicted of giving a bribe to a representative of the financial police to obtain confidential information about judicial police officers. Abiyev said [his arrest was directly linked to his work as a journalist](#).

One of his *Zakon i Pravosudie* colleagues, **Oralgaiша Omarshanova**, went missing in 2007 and was never found.

Abiyev's disappearance comes amid a dramatic decline in the climate for the media in Kazakhstan. [The past 12 months have seen an unprecedented increase in persecution of independent and opposition journalists culminating in a recent ban on the main national opposition media.](#)

Photo: RFE/RL

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