

Reporters Without Borders

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Europe & ex-USSR - Kyrgyzstan

Unacceptable precedent

Kyrgyz parliament orders blocking of news website of record

17 June 2011

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by the Kyrgyz parliament's adoption of a [resolution](#) yesterday issuing a legally binding instruction to the prosecutor general's office, culture ministry and justice ministry to block access to the independent online news agency *Ferghana* (www.ferghananews.com) because of its coverage of last year's violence in the south of the country.

"Blocking access to *Ferghana* would constitute a very shocking attack on one of Kyrgyzstan's leading independent news media," Reporters Without Borders said. "*Ferghana*'s coverage of [the June 2010 clashes](#) demonstrated an exemplary professionalism and desire to defuse tension. The order recalls the worst period of censorship in Kyrgyzstan. This press freedom violation is all the more unacceptable as Kyrgyzstan aspires to be a regional model of parliamentary democracy."

The call for *Ferghana*'s blocking was contained in a resolution adopted yesterday after a special parliamentary commission presented [the findings of its investigation into the June 2010 violence in the south](#). They included a recommendation to block *Ferghana*.

Reporters Without Borders wrote last week to the president of this parliamentary commission voicing alarm about this recommendation, especially as *Ferghana* is one of the leading news media of record in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Central Asia.

Now that the recommendation has been adopted, Reporters Without Borders has decided to release the text of the letter.

Reporters Without Borders letter, dated 10 June 2011, to Tokon Mamytov, president of the parliamentary commission of enquiry into the events of June 2010:

Dear Mr. Mamytov,

Reporters Without Borders, an organization that defends media freedom, would like to express its alarm about a recommendation concerning the online news agency *Ferghana* (ferghananews.com) that has been made by the parliamentary commission of enquiry into the events of June 2010.

As president of the commission, you announced during a plenary session of the Kyrgyz parliament on 9 June that the blocking of this news website within Kyrgyzstan would be one of the measures proposed in the parliamentary investigation's conclusions because it had posted "subjective reports about the 2010 clashes."

We are shocked by this attack on a leading news portal, one that plays such a key role for the media both in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia in general. Thanks to the recognized professionalism of its journalists, *Ferghana* has for 12 years been providing quality reporting on political, economic and social developments and contributing to media plurality in the region.

Ferghana is not responsible for bad news, which it just relays and analyzes. During the events in Osh, the website exhibited exemplary responsibility and professionalism. While trying to provide detailed coverage of the tragic events unfolding in the south, it repeatedly carried calls

for calm and constantly explained that the clashes had been provoked.

The parliamentary enquiry's stature will be diminished if it opts for an all-out attack on independent media. The new government would be sending a terrible signal for freedom of expression if it blocked *Ferghana*. Previous attacks on the website have always coincided with crackdowns, as in 2005, on the eve of President Askar Akayev's fall, and again in 2010, on the eve of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's ouster.

As the representative of a democratic body, you could not call for the elimination of one of your country's most respected news outlets.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our letter.

Sincerely,

Jean-François Julliard Reporters Without Borders secretary-general

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