

**Statement of the Open Dialogue Foundation at OSCE HDIM 2019 Working Session 6 -  
Fundamental freedoms II, including:  
– Freedom of peaceful assembly and association**

The Open Dialogue Foundation is a human rights NGO committed to fighting political persecution and human rights violations in the post-Soviet area.

In the past few months we have witnessed that freedom of assembly is under attack around the OSCE area and beyond. Worrying similarities in trends of repression of civil society have become evident. This summer's large-scale protests in **Hong Kong** have reminded us of Chinese unwillingness to accept dissent: repression and attempts to obtain condemnation of the protests from the Western and European side, represented an evidence of this hostility towards civil activism. The controversial extradition law has quite understandably alarmed Hong Kong's society, given China's consistent abuse of mutual legal assistance mechanisms such as INTERPOL's Red Notices to persecute dissidents or dissenting voices abroad.

In the very same days that Hongkongers were taking the streets, in **Kazakhstan** citizens were protesting in mass against early presidential elections perceived as unfair and a merely staged transfer of power, entailing no substantial change in government. However, these peaceful protests were met with harsh repression and mass arbitrary detention of more than 4000 protesters, irregular interrogations.

Few weeks later **Russian** civil society showed its discontent in the largest peaceful demonstrations since 2012, openly defying police forces in the streets, in protest against the authorities' decision to ban opposition representatives from running in the Moscow city council.

While we witness a stronger engagement from the side of peaceful protesters, we want to condemn the authorities' continued violations of the freedom of assembly and the abuse of "extremism" charges as a tool of political persecution. Both Russia and Kazakhstan have been using laws aimed at discouraging the "incitement of extremism" with a worryingly broad scope, as grounds for civil or criminal prosecution. In Russia, peaceful protesters are even under the real threat of being deprived of their parental rights, as in the case of Peter and Elena Khomskikh, who came with their children to unauthorized rally on August 3. In Kazakhstan, 23 y.o. Alimzhan Izbassarov, was drafted to the army after participating in the peaceful protests on May 1, 2019.

While security is the main pillar of the OSCE, measures aimed at ensuring the safety in the region should not be abused to internally repress dissent or active engagement of civil society. We invite OSCE members to openly condemn the action of the participating States that do not respect their own commitments and join, for the case of Kazakhstan, the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, who explicitly criticised the misuse of anti-extremism legislation.

Thank you.

