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## Freedom House Strengthening Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan

### Juvenile and women's colonies in Kyrgyzstan

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There are a few organizations, some supported by Freedom House, that are monitoring detention facilities – IVSs, SIZOs and colonies – in Kyrgyzstan. The State Service for Execution of Punishment (GSIN) has been cooperative in allowing access to their colonies and Freedom House, in cooperation with the OSCE Center in Bishkek, has trained about 80 GSIN staff, including heads of SIZOs and colonies, on human rights and the National Preventive Center (Kyrgyzstan's National Preventative Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture).

Although there have been some difficulties with access to SIZOs, the participants of the Memorandum of Understanding on access to and monitoring of detention facilities, which includes Freedom House, are working to address this. These relate to the dual status of those held there as the SIZOs are under GSIN but the pretrial detainees are technically under the Ministry of Interior.



**Penitentiary Facility N° 10, Jalal-Abad (operational capacity of 1548 inmates) Photo: Alessandro Scotti; 'Support to Prison Reform in the Kyrgyz Republic' project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.**

In June 2012 The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported,

“As of January 2012, there were over 9,800 prisoners in Kyrgyzstan, including 2,000 held in pretrial detention facilities. The Kyrgyz prison service faces many challenges, including poor facilities, buildings in disrepair and a lack of professional training for prison staff. The prison service is severely underfunded, while poor pay and dangerous working conditions make it difficult to attract qualified staff. In addition, the scarcity of pretrial detention centres in some regions leads to overcrowding in prisons.”

Recently, Freedom House representatives, along with Eric Gurlan an international photojournalist interested in making an investigative photo-journalistic report on detention facilities in Kyrgyzstan, and Cholpon Omurakunova, the head of the NGO Egel and chairwoman of the GSIN public oversight council, visited the juvenile and women’s colonies.

The juvenile colony is located in Voznesinovskoe, about an hour and a half drive from Bishkek. Just a few years ago, the juvenile colony housed over 200 young offenders in conditions that the facilities’ staff openly admitted were horrendous, including overcrowding, insufficient food, and internal controls by gangs. Following the humanization of the criminal laws, which reduced sentences for minor offenses, and amnesty, there are currently less than 40 juveniles – all males - in custody. They all appeared to be healthy, in good condition and are split into three dormitories, with bunk beds provided by the predecessor to the Transit Center. Toilets and shower facilities are separated from the housing. Each group has at least two supervisors 24/7 and during the day there are about 40 staff members on the site. One group that is stigmatized by their crimes, usually sex offenders, are housed separately to avoid confrontations with others.

The Director of the colony purchased rabbits that the juveniles raise and tend to as a form of therapy. Cholpon initiated a rehabilitation center, which provides psycho-social services to help with reintegration of the juveniles back into society, upon their release. All of the juveniles attend classes, although IT facilities are lacking with only one, very old computer working. There is large space for sports outside and a building is being refurbished for a smaller indoor sports area for use during the winter. Medical services are provided onsite, including old, Soviet era dental equipment that would make a nice exhibition in a museum. Three meals are prepared each day in a separate dining hall. Those who break the rules are placed in a small, enclosed cell with a toilet in the corner. A small, dark and dank place that the staff showed us and we entered, as it was currently empty. When there were hundreds of juveniles, these discipline units were always in use. Staff indicated, however, that in the last 6 months it has been used only once.



From left to right, Eric Gurlan, Cholpon Omurakunova, Mirbeck Minbaev (Director women's colony) and Stuart Kahn

The women’s colony is in Stepnoe, less than an hour from Bishkek. Mirbeck Minbaev, the Director since May 2012, has overseen a number of improvements. Currently 300 women, including one juvenile, are housed at the colony. The women are divided into groups with separate housing: quarantine, tuberculosis, juvenile, women with children, elderly and disabled, drug and alcohol rehabilitation center and all others. All new inmates are placed for about two weeks in the quarantine area for orientation and medical evaluation. There were two inmates in the TB unit and the mobile

x-ray unit – carried in a large, Soviet era Kamaz truck - had just arrived for testing inmates. The oldest woman inmate is 87 years old. There were 9 children with their mothers in a separate building. In general, children can stay until they are 3-4 years old, depending on the sentence of their mother and available family members as caretakers on the outside.

Except for the elderly, disabled and women with children, who have single beds, inmates use bunk beds that are lined up 30 or more to a room, two rooms per floor, in two story buildings. Some of the housing units had been refurbished with new windows, doors, toilets and showers, which stood in stark contrast to those that had not and additional funding is needed to upgrade those. Each housing unit has a small kitchen area with cooking on hot plates that the women were using to make borsok in preparation for Kurman Ait, which they shared with us (and was quite tasty). A separate kitchen area provides the main meals for the inmates.

Those who are able work in one of the two factories. About 130 inmates – in two shifts during the day - work in the sewing factory, which was provided with new sewing machines from a European Union program. According to the director, women who work here can easily obtain similar jobs when they are released. The EU has also supported a small soy milk production facility, which will be the only such facility in Kyrgyzstan to produce soy milk and will be provided to other colonies. Inmates are currently learning how to use the equipment and production is expected to start in a couple of weeks.

Medical facilities are admittedly dilapidated and in need of funding for reconstruction. The drug and alcohol rehabilitation center had 10 women taking the “12 steps” course. The course lasts for 4-6 months and by the end of the course the patients join the general population.

Although both the juvenile and women’s colonies were very clean, they need assistance to make additional refurbishments for housing units and medical facilities and to upgrade the educational facilities and rehabilitation center for the juveniles.

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