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| October 8, 2012 17:58



*Dissident calls prison sentence an "undisguised attempt" to curb opposition.*

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Leading Kazakh dissident Vladimir Kozlov was sentenced Monday to seven and a half years in prison on charges of orchestrating unrest among oil workers, [reported BBC News](#).

The head of the major opposition Alga! party, technically an "unofficial" political party in the tightly-controlled Central Asian nation, Kozlov had rejected the charges as politically motivated, [said Reuters](#).

The 52-year-old was sentenced at a court in Aktau, which lies west of the capital, Astana, [according to Reuters](#).

Oil workers gathered in the main square of a nearby town, Zhanaozen, for seven months to demand higher wages. The December 2011 demonstrations ended in violence, with riot police firing on the crowd and killing at least 15 people, [said the BBC](#).


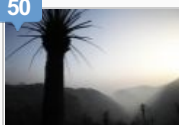


Kazakhstan, a former Soviet state with the largest economy in Central Asia, is run by 72-year-old authoritarian President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Human rights workers frequently slam his administration for attacking activists, persecuting members of the opposition, and using extreme violence against protesters.

But Kozlov was not the only opposition figure involved in the Aktau oil affair. Bolat Atabayev, a theater director and human rights champion, was there too. Atabayev even directed a play alluding to the oil protest, [according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#). "I personally



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encouraged the oil workers to use only peaceful means to achieve their goals," Atabaev told the San Francisco Freedom Forum on Thursday. "I told them it was their legal right."

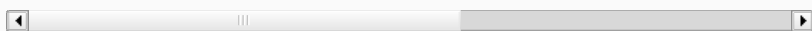


Like Kozlov, Atabayev was arrested, but thanks to international intervention was released and has since fled the country.

Detailing a number of human rights violations he says are being committed by the government, Atabaev told his California audience that "Kazakhstan is like North Korea." The difference being Western businesses are very active in his oil-rich country, and "when it comes to their business, when it comes to their economic interests, of themselves, and their countries, they forget about moral values," he said.

"They say, 'we are not entitled to interfere into domestic affairs of another country,'" Atabayev said. "I'm sorry, our countries are members of the [Organisation for Security and Cooperation], of the United Nations, it means we have to follow the accepted rules of behaving in other countries. Or does it mean that we're democratic only in our countries at home, and in countries where there is a lot of raw materials to extract and where the fundamental rights of humans are violated, we're blind and deaf?"

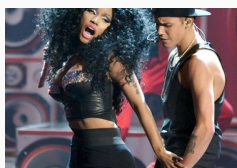
Watch Atabayev's full speech here:



<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/121008/vladimir-kozlov-major-kazakh-opposition-figure-handed-7-year-jai>

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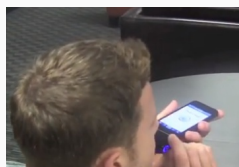


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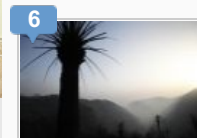
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