EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Member of the European Parliament

Open letter to President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev from Members of the European Parliament

21 December 2011

Dear President Nazarbayev,

With great concern, we have heard reports of brutal violence used by state forces against striking oil workers from the KazMunaiGas company, their supporters and families in the city of Zhanaozen in western Kazakhstan.

On 16 December, Kazakhstan's Independence Day, more than 3,000 people assembled to support the demands of the oil workers who have been on strike since May.

We were horrified to hear that the riot police attacked the protesters, opening fire with live ammunition on the unarmed strikers and their families. Although the official state reports have only admitted that 11 people have died, the reports from the workers' trade union put the death toll at between 50 and 70, with as many as 500 people injured.

We have heard that the city of Zhanaozen is surrounded and occupied by troops and armoured vehicles, with police implementing mass arrests. There is a curfew from 11pm to 7am. Transport movements are limited, demonstrations, public assemblies and strikes are forbidden. Hospitals in Zhanaozen and the nearby city of Aktau are overflowing with those wounded in the shootings. All social media and mainstream media have been blocked in an attempt to stop the news reports spreading.

We the undersigned condemn the violence used by the Kazakh state forces against the strikers and their supporters. We demand the withdrawal of all troops and an immediate genuinely independent inquiry into this atrocity, with those responsible being brought to justice.

We call for an end to the repression of opposition activists and trade unionists. All those imprisoned must be released, including the oil workers' lawyer, Natalia Sokolova who was sentenced to 6 years for 'stirring up social conflict' earlier this year.

We also call on the Kazakhstan government to initiate meaningful negotiations with the employers and representatives of the striking oil workers. They have now been on strike for nearly 7 months, with no meaningful attempts to resolve the conflict.

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Yours faithfully,

Paul Murphy MEP (GUE/NGL, Ireland)
Sonia Alfano MEP (ALDE, Italy)
Pino Arlacchi MEP (S&D, Italy)
José Bové MEP (Greens/EFA, France)
Cristian Busoi MEP (ALDE, Romania)
Frieda Brepoels MEP (Greens/EFA, Belgium)
Nessa Childers MEP (S&D, Ireland)
Nikolaos Chountis MEP (GUE/NGL, Greece)
Marije Cornelissen MEP (Greens/EFA, Netherlands)
Leonidas Donskis MEP (ALDE, Lithuania)
Bas Eickhout MEP (Greens/EFA, Netherlands)
Cornelia Ernst MEP (GUE/NGL, Germany)
Ana Gomes MEP (S&D, Portugal)
Gerald Häfner MEP (Greens/EFA, Germany)
Elie Hoarau MEP (GUE/NGL, France)
Vincenzo Iovine MEP (ALDE, Italy)
Sajjad H. Karim MEP (ECR, UK)
Seán Kelly MEP (EPP, Ireland)
Nicole Kiil-Nielsen MEP (Greens/EFA, France)
Jürgen Klute MEP (GUE/NGL, Germany)
Patrick LeHyriac MEP (GUE/NGL, France)
Kartika Liotard MEP (GUE/NGL, Netherlands)
Barbara Lochbihler MEP (Greens/EFA, Germany)
Sabine Lösing MEP (GUE/NGL, Germany)
Elizabeth Lynne MEP (ALDE, UK)
David Martin MEP (S&D, UK)
Marisa Matias MEP (GUE/NGL, Portugal)
Emilio Menéndez del Valle MEP (S&D, Spain)
Willy Meyer MEP (GUE/NGL, Spain)
Marek Migalski MEP (ECR, Poland)
María Muñiz de Urquiza MEP (S&D, Spain)
Bill Newton Dunn MEP (ALDE, UK)
Miquel Portas MEP (GUE/NGL, Portugal)
Phil Prendergast MEP (S&D, Ireland)
Satu Hassi MEP (Greens/EFA, Finland)
Michèle Rivasi MEP (Greens/EFA, France)
Judith Sargentini MEP (Greens/EFA, Netherlands)
Carl Schlyter MEP (Greens/EFA, Sweden)
Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL, Denmark)
Bart Staes MEP (Greens/EFA, Belgium)
Rui Tavares MEP (Greens/EFA, Portugal)
Keith Taylor MEP (Greens/EFA, UK)
Helga Trüpel MEP (Greens/EFA, Germany)
Kyriacos Triantaphyllides MEP (GUE/NGL, Cyprus)
Marie-Christine Vergiat MEP (GUE/NGL, France)
Sabine Wils MEP (GUE/NGL, Germany)
Andrea Zanoni MEP (ALDE, Italy)
Gabi Zimmer MEP (GUE/NGL, Germany)