



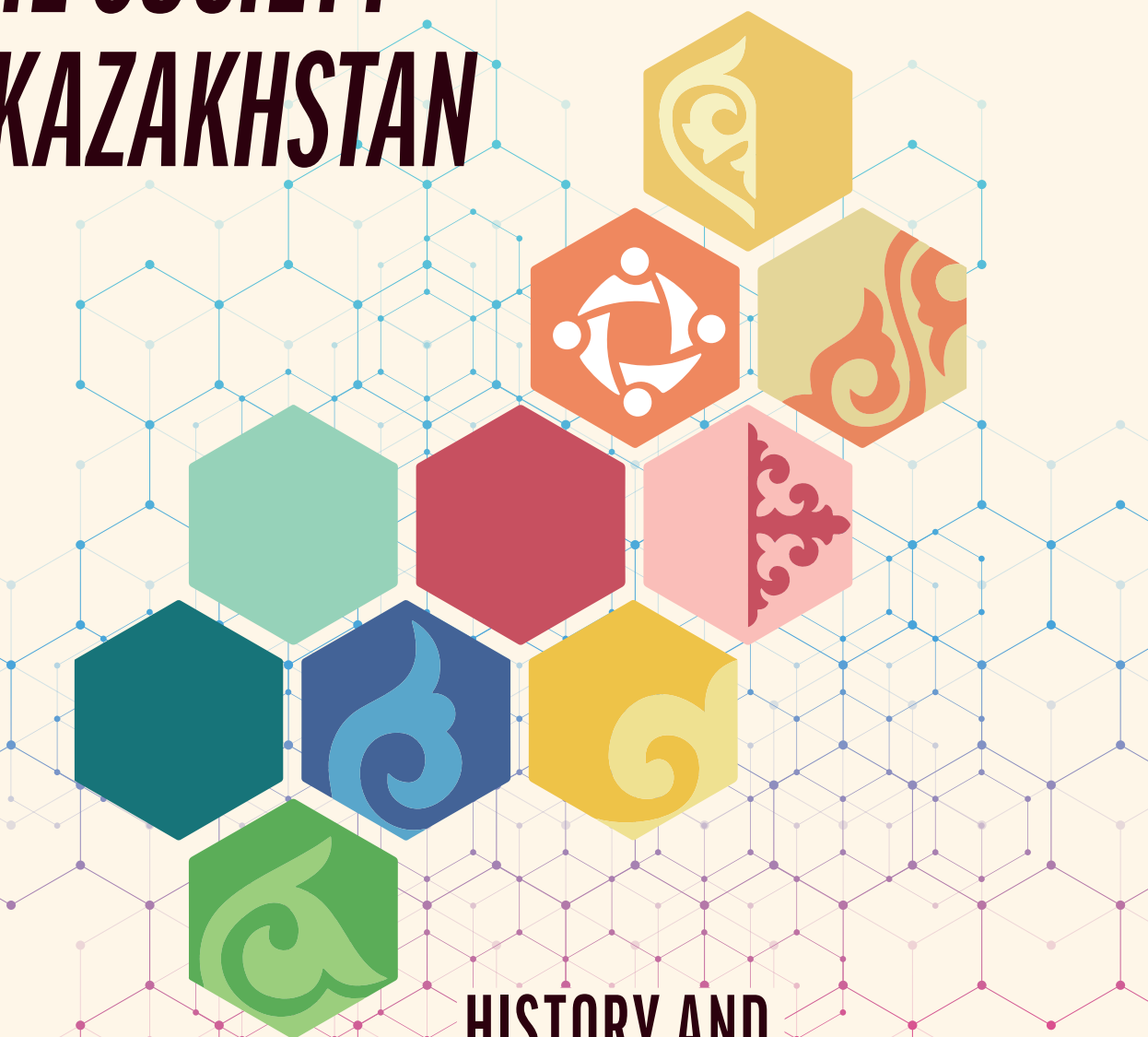
Adal Azamat

#1 (01-02) 2023

M A G A Z I N E O F C I V I L S O C I E T Y



CIVIL SOCIETY IN KAZAKHSTAN



**HISTORY AND
CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES**



CIVIL ALLIANCE OF KAZAKHSTAN

THE MAIN MISSION OF THE CAK IS DEVELOPMENT
OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

The ALE in the form of association "Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan" is one of the largest republican associations, which covers more than 5,000 non-profit organizations throughout the country.

The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan was established in 2005. Distinctive feature of the Alliance is its regional structures, which are represented in each region of the country.

MAIN TASKS:

- promoting the development of the non-governmental sector, improving the efficiency and quality of the work of NGOs in Kazakhstan
- ensuring favorable legal, economic and social conditions for the implementation of public initiatives
- development of mutually beneficial partnership between the society, business structures, international organizations and public authorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- support for the activities of Public Councils in the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- uniting the efforts of members and partners for sustainable development and promotion of democratic processes in Kazakhstan

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Content

-
- 4 Welcoming address by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
-
- 6 Welcoming address by Aida Balayeva, Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan
-
- 8 Welcoming address by Johannes D. Rey, Head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kazakhstan
-
- 10 Welcoming address by Banu Nurgaziyeva, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan
-
- 12 The year 2023 in the life of civil society in Kazakhstan
-
- 14 Kazakhstan today: on the way to building an equal partnership between the state and civil society
-
- 22 Civil society: evolutionary development and an effective management system
-
- 26 *Katarzyna Wawiernia:*
Working with NGOs is an important part of our efforts
-
- 30 *Yevgeniy Zhovtis:*
Strong civil society is conditional on freedom and democracy
-
- 34 *Aigul Solovyova:*
The Civil Alliance should become a strategic partner of the state
-
- 38 *Talgat Kaliyev:*
Civil society is agents of change
-
- 42 *Zhemis Turmagambetova:*
Every citizen has the right to be heard
-
- 46 *Laila Akhmetova:*
Kazakhstan has real public leaders!
-
- 50 *Lyazzat Kaltayeva:*
Embracing inclusion through maintaining equal dialogue
-
- 54 *Bakhytkul Yelchibayeva:*
Helping people – the meaning of life
-
- 58 *Zhaksygul Makhanbetova:*
Full partner of the state and business
-
- 62 Quick round of questions: Civil society is...

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WELCOMING ADDRESS BY KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN



The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Astana, Akorda

../10/2023

Participants of
the XI Civil Society Forum

Dear Forum members!

Congratulations on the opening of the XI Civil Society Forum!

For twenty years, the effectiveness and necessity of this forum have been proven, and it has become a platform for serious reflection and balanced opinions.

The creative initiatives and rational proposals put forward here will give a new impetus to the development of civil society and the strengthening of national accord.

Non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations, active citizens and volunteers who are not indifferent to the fate of the country, take maximum part in solving urgent problems of the society.

They demonstrate the best practices of cooperation and true patriotism, make a great contribution to the preservation of unity and peace in our country.

The large-scale changes taking place in Kazakhstan require the formation of a new ethics in society.

Justice and humanism, mutual trust and responsibility, law and order, diligence and curiosity should become the core of the new ethics.

I am confident that close cooperation between the state and the non-governmental sector will contribute to the comprehensive development of the country and create a fair Kazakhstan.

I wish you all well-being and further success!

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tokayev', written in a cursive style.



WELCOMING ADDRESS BY AIDA BALAYEVA, MINISTER OF CULTURE AND INFORMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

DEAR READERS!

Congratulations on the release of the first issue of the international magazine AdalAzamat, which will become an important source of information on development of civil society in Kazakhstan. It is symbolic that the launch of the project is timed to coincide with the next anniversary of our Independence – for the expert community and the general audience, this is an important reason for a retrospective analysis of the results achieved.

It is worth noting that over 32 years of sovereign development, the Kazakh non-governmental sector has seriously strengthened under the wing of the state and has embarked on an independent voyage. Now it is a full partner of the executive branch in the implementation of a wide range of social tasks.

As President Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich Tokayev noted in his address to the participants of the recent XI Civil Society Forum, «non-governmental and charitable organizations, civil activists and volunteers set an example of solidarity and active patriotism and fully contribute to preserving unity and harmony in the country.»

The President pays special attention to the formation of new social ethics, united under the single concept of «AdalAzamat» («Responsible citizen») being an indivisible component of building a Just Kazakhstan. The joint work of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Civil Alliance and other key participants in the public dialogue will help achieve the goals set by the President. Moreover, all conditions have been created in the country for this.

Firstly, there is a large-scale civil infrastructure consisting of more than 18 thousand active NGOs. Most of the associations are concentrated in the areas of support for vulnerable social groups, youth and children's policy, legal protection, health protection, ecology, education and science.

Secondly, a favorable legislative environment has been provided. In particular, the Concept of Civil Society Development until 2030 and the Law «On Public Control» were adopted, amendments were made to legalize online petitions, legislation on public councils, peaceful assemblies, charity, volunteer activities, state social procurement and grant financing of NGOs was strengthened.

The civil initiatives sector is entering the new year of 2024 with optimism and clear plans. I am sure that the concrete results of our effective cooperation will be reflected in the pages of this magazine.

Balayeva Aida Galymovna
Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan



WELCOMING ADDRESS BY JOHANNES D. REY, HEAD OF THE KONRAD ADENAUER FOUNDATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

DEAR READERS!

On behalf of Konrad Adenauer Foundation, I would like to sincerely welcome you.

By publishing the new magazine ADALAZAMAT («Honest Citizen») together with the well-known NGO «Association «Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan», we want to promote the development of civil society and political dialogue, as well as provide a platform for discussing key issues and ideas.

The difficult geopolitical situation not only creates new challenges, but also opens up new opportunities for more intensive cooperation between peoples and countries that want to contribute to the formation of peaceful and sustainable world.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to the values of democracy, self-determination and strengthening civil society. The active participation of citizens should be an integral part of democratic development. On the pages of this first issue of our magazine you will find a variety of opinions, in-depth analyses and inspiring stories that shed light on various aspects of civil society in politics and society.

We invite all readers to become a part of our cooperation and strive for dialogue with us, KAS and the Civil Alliance in order to jointly form a more just, open and sustainable society in Kazakhstan and Germany.

With warmest regards,

Johannes D. Rey

Head of Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kazakhstan



DEAR COLLEAGUES, DEAR FRIENDS!

Let me welcome you with great gladness, the first readers of AdalAzamat magazine, which will unite all of us, citizens who are not indifferent to the development of civil society in Kazakhstan, those who wholeheartedly support the building a just and free state in which the well-being of people is in the foreground.

We live in a swift-flowing time. This year our country will celebrate 32 years since its Independence. By historical standards, this is just a moment. But during this period, the country has seriously strengthened on the world stage and has taken its rightful place. Over the years, the society of Kazakhstan has changed and continues to change, and its civic activity is increasing every year. From the fragmentation of civil initiatives and the lack of clearly defined guidelines, we are moving towards building a unified mechanism for the work and consolidation of civil society.

Almost 18 years ago, in 2005, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan (hereinafter – the CAK, the Alliance) was established. The main mission of the Alliance is development of civil society in the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the main task is to establish permanent contacts between the government and civil society through the CAK. Every two years, a unique and large-scale event is held under the auspices of the CAK, which is key to solving issues of civil society development – the Civil Forum of Kazakhstan. This forum has become the largest dialogue platform for building permanent communication between NGOs and the state.

The Alliance is one of the largest republican associations, covering over 5,000 non-profit organizations across the country.

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY BANU NURGAZIYEVA, PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIL ALLIANCE OF KAZAKHSTAN

Of course, the Civil Alliance, along with the civil society of Kazakhstan itself, will have a progressive and long-term development, but today we are already demonstrating the ability not only to solve the problems of certain categories of citizens, but to be an equal partner to the state in making decisions at all levels of government, in all spheres of life.

The civil sector today is: about 2 000 000 volunteers;

more than 1 000 000 services annually; 11 000 candidates and doctors of sciences on the staff and involved in the work of NGOs; 17 500 experts are involved in social projects.

From the period when the non-governmental sector was left to its own device, we are moving to the stage of meaningful dialogue and partnership with government and business. That is why we have decided to publish a civil society magazine and about civil society in order to provide another dialogue platform for the civil sector.

Now you are holding in your hands the first issue of our international official publication AdalAzamat, in subsequent issues of which, I hope, you will find answers to many of your questions about the dialogue between Kazakh society and the authorities.

Our magazine will be about how the dialogue of civil society with government agencies should be conducted today, about the place and role of the non-governmental sector in the modern realities of the socio-economic development of the country.

On the pages of the magazine, we will raise and widely discuss the issues of concern to us. There are a lot of them. Some of them were announced at the XI Civil Forum of Kazakhstan held this year.

We will actively promote the adoption of the Law «On Non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan». There are issues of creating the organization's infrastructure in the regions, staffing, NGO participation in the mandatory public examination of draft laws, development of clear and transparent mechanism for strategic partnership between the state and the third sector, etc. All this will be reflected in the pages of the new edition.

On behalf of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan and the entire civil society, we would like to express our great gratitude to our partner, the Representative Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kazakhstan and its head, Mr. Johannes D. Rey for support in publishing the AdalAzamat magazine.

It has long been proven that a strong civil sector is the key to the success of any government reforms. Together with you, dear readers, we will keep abreast of the multifaceted life of Kazakhstan's civil society and strengthen the dialogue of the triad «society-state-business»!

Way to go, AdalAzamat!

*Banu Nurgaziyeva,
President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan*

The year 2023 in the life of civil society in Kazakhstan

One of the most important events of 2023 was the September Message of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to the people of Kazakhstan «The Economic Course of Just Kazakhstan», in which he outlined the transition to a new economic model with the aim of really improving people's lives. As the president of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, Banu Nurgazyieva, noted in one of her speeches, the new vector in the economic development of the country proposed by the head of state has become the main incentive for changing the vector of interaction between society and the authorities.



In 2023, the Concept of Ensuring Public Safety in partnership with the society for 2024-2028 was approved.

The concept defines a further strategy for ensuring law and order in the country by building an integrated crime prevention system based on the joint responsibility of all its subjects and establishing a constructive partnership with the population.

It is envisaged to introduce a special accountability mechanism in the form of a National report on the state of public security in the country, which will ensure proper systematic monitoring of the implementation of the Concept's activities.

The central element of the prevention system will be the solution of regional security problems by local executive bodies together with the police and the public.

It is supposed to involve all institutions of state power and civil society in creating an atmosphere of intolerance to violence. A special role in this area is assigned to local communities, public opinion authorities and religious associations that promote secular values of Kazakh society and interfaith harmony.

In general, the Concept will become the foundation for building an effective crime prevention system.

The XI Civil Society Forum of Kazakhstan this year was special. In the year of the twentieth anniversary of the SCF, it was decided to hold it in all 20 regions of the country. At all the dialogue platforms of the forum, there was a conversation about what the dialogue of civil society with government agencies should be today, about the place and role of the non-governmental sector in the modern realities of the socio-economic development of the country. The main

idea of the Forum is to show the high level of development of civil society and its role in the implementation of the country's strategic plans under the motto «Mature civil society is the pillar of a prosperous Kazakhstan».

The main dialogue between the government and society took place in two stages. From May to October, discussions were held in all regions of the country. At the Civil Forum of 2023 model, the number of participants, thanks to regional forums, turned out

to be ten times more.

With the participation of almost 4,000 people representing the entire palette of civil society, 20 of the most important topics for the country were discussed. More than 400 recommendations have been made to local and central government agencies, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, business structures and experts.

Over the years of Independence, the number of non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan has increased from 100 to 23 thousand. The active development of the civil sector indicates that all the necessary conditions have been created in the country for the active work of NGO leaders and experts – the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan notes.

One of the key factors was the approval of the «Concept for Development of civil society in the Republic of Kazakhstan» by the President on August 27, 2020. Thanks to the strategic document that defined the vector of development of the civil sector, NGOs are actively being created in the country in various areas. The main goal of non-governmental organizations is to achieve socially important goals and objectives.

In general, in 2023, the number of NGOs increased by at least 8.6% compared to previous years.

In the third decade of September, the UNICEF Talks youth conference was held in the capital of Kazakhstan, organized by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the public talk format. The annual event dedicated to youth and held for young people was held under the motto «Jastar Üni». The goal is to provide children and youth with an open platform for the free expression of their opinions on all issues that relate to their interests and rights.

«At UNICEF, we believe in the voice of youth and strive to make that voice heard. For almost thirty years, UNICEF has been working in Kazakhstan to ensure that all children's rights are respected. Among the well-known rights to education, health care, and life in a loving family, there is also a less well-known one – the right to freely express child's own views on all issues affecting the child. Here, at the UNICEF Talks site, this right becomes a reality,»

Leticia Bazzi-Vale, Acting Representative of UNICEF in Kazakhstan, stressed in her speech.

The headliners of the event were the national goodwill ambassadors of UNICEF in Kazakhstan, members of the group NINETY ONE. They shared their personal stories and experiences of dealing with the bullying problem.

Together with NINETY ONE, sixteen speakers aged 11 to 23 years old, representing schools and universities from different regions of Kazakhstan, spoke at the conference. Their inspiring stories and experience of overcoming current problems have become a valuable source of motivation for all those present.

The event gathered more than 200 participants, including representatives of the central government bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the diplomatic corps, the media and the general public.

The delegation of the Association of Business Women of Kazakhstan took part in the 25th Global Women's Summit, which was held from May 4-6, 2023 in Dubai, UAE.

The Kazakh delegation was represented by 71 women leaders. She became the largest delegation of the Summit among 74 countries.

Global and regional megatrends were discussed at the plenary sessions of the Summit, and forums of leaders and women CEOs were held. The topics discussed were: digital transformation and the future of work; enterprises of the future; forum of women entrepreneurs «dialogue of intergenerations».

The Association of Business Women of Kazakhstan has been a regular participant and international partner of the Global Women's Summit for 25 years, where thousands of influential and successful women from all over the world gather annually to discuss current trends and present the latest tools for professional growth and effective business management.



KAZAKHSTAN TODAY: ON THE WAY TO BUILDING AN EQUAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY



Over a 20-year period, the civil sector has become a real driving force that solves citizens' problems and becomes an equal partner to the state in decision-making. This was once again confirmed by the Civil Forum, which became a record in terms of the number of participants and the problems raised.

Civil forums have been held in Kazakhstan for 20 years. In October 2003, the first republican congress of non-governmental organizations was held, which was proclaimed the first Civil Forum. It was then that the main goal was outlined – to develop a partnership between the state and NGOs to solve urgent problems of society.

Two years later, the initiative to create a Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan was supported at the second Civil Forum. The introduction of state social procurement system at the central, sectoral and regional levels has begun, and proposals have been developed for the interaction of NGOs and business.

Over the years, the Civil Forum has turned into a dialogue platform where important issues of social development are discussed and accepted. Thanks to the initiatives raised at this high level, the 2006-2010 Concept of Civil Society Development was approved and adopted in Kazakhstan in 2006. Its main goal was an equal partnership between the state and civil society institutions.

A number of areas in which NGOs are actively working have been identified. They include solving gender problems, supporting the material and technical base of medical institutions and medical and social patronage of the population, supporting disabled people, solving environmental problems. NGOs that solve problems in the field of culture, art and the media were later widespread.

In general, over the twenty years of its existence, the Civil Forum has become the largest platform where problems of society are discussed and new ideas for building a Just Kazakhstan are put forward.

NEW FORMAT OF FORUM

The eleventh Civil Forum, held this year, was no exception. Each region held it at home, in total about 5 thousand people took part at the regional level. Each region submitted one of the most important issues for discussion at the Republican Forum. There were 20 issues.

For example, in the capital city, forum was held at the Astana International Financial Center. According to Mr. Yerlan Bekmurzayev, Deputy Akim of Astana city, more than 1 thousand non-governmental organizations are working actively in the capital today. In 2023, Akimat together with NGOs are implementing 55 social projects in the field of education, healthy lifestyle, support for youth, children's initiatives and vulnerable social groups, solving family and household issues.

More than 15 multifunctional centers were opened in the capital city. The purpose of such centers is to support civil initiatives and solve crisis situations.

The first civil forum in the Abay region was accompanied by awarding the best NGOs in the region with prizes and letters of thanks in several nominations, such as "The best non-governmental organization in the field of law and order", "The best non-governmental organization in the field of volunteer activity", "The best non-governmental organization in the

field of research" and others. Meeting of dialogue platforms dedicated to the development of civil society was held in the Abay Library.

The Regional Civil Forum in Zhetysay region brought up for discussion the topic "Problems and prospects for development of local government bodies". The forum was attended by representatives of all 17 regions of the country and the cities of Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, republican, regional NGOs, political parties, religious associations and business representatives, deputies of various levels.

The event in Kostanay region attracted the attention of representatives of the public of Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan, France, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia and Denmark. Representatives of the diplomatic corps of Belgium, Great Britain and the Netherlands arrived specially to participate in the forum. During dialogue platform "Development of international cooperation for solving social issues", the participants discussed not only current problems, but also proposed many solutions based on the experience of other countries.

Another important issue discussed at the Kostanay forum was possibilities, advantages and disadvantages of using neural networks in the work of NGOs. The forum participants studied international experience in public procurement and budget transparency, exchanged experience and best practices in ensuring transparency and efficiency of public procurement.

Participants of regional Civil Forum in Uralsk discussed the issue "Inclusive public policy: the contribution of local society".

The XIII Regional Civil Forum has already been held in Almaty. The participants were offered the topic "Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals: modern challenges and opportunities for their solution by civil society". More than 300 representatives of NGOs, government and business from all over the country discussed the problems and prospects of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mrs. Assem Asankhanova, the Head of Civil Alliance of Ulytau region spoke succinctly about the goals and objectives of the forum at the briefing in Astana following the results of the republican event: "Today, civil society is a bridge between the state and the population with their own problems and needs. It is not enough just to want to live in a "Listening" state, it is necessary to form it ourselves."





THE CIVIL SECTOR HAS BECOME A REAL DRIVING FORCE

Mrs. Banu Nurgaziyeva, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, told at a briefing in Astana about results achieved following the XI Civil Forum. The purpose of the forum, according to her, was to strengthen social partnership between civil society and government agencies. It should be aimed at solving social problems in local communities.

The new vector in the economic development of the country, proposed by President Tokayev, has become the main incentive for changing the vector of interaction between society and the authorities. This was discussed at all the venues of the XI Civil Forum of Kazakhstan.

“Today, the civil sector has become a real driving force capable not only of solving the problems of certain categories of citizens, but also of being an equal partner to the state in making decisions at all levels of government, in all spheres of life,” – said Banu Nurgaziyeva, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.

In total, the civil sector of Kazakhstan is now represented by about 2 million volunteers who, within the framework of NGOs and actions, provide more than 1 million services to citizens every year. 17.5 thousand experts are involved in social projects every year. In general, according to expert estimates, the share of services provided by NGOs of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan is up to 5% of the Republic’s GDP.

Mrs. Banu Nurgaziyeva stressed that the civil sector is not so homogeneous yet, and a number of problems related to the level of development of NGOs, especially in remote, rural areas, remain unresolved.

Like the economic sector, civil society institutions are experiencing a shortage of professional personnel. An administrative barrier to the growth and financial sustainability of NGOs is the existing taxation system. The formalism in the work of individual government agencies does not contribute to improving the situation in the civil sector, and the infrastructure for supporting and developing NGOs is also poorly developed.

“But all these issues can and should be resolved. Their solution is in the interests of the whole society. I will repeat myself and say: Strong civil sector is the key to the success of any government reforms,” – said Banu Nurgaziyeva.







SOCIAL ACTIVISTS ARE ASKING FOR A SEPARATE LAW

One of the key issues raised by NGOs is the need to develop a separate law “On non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, which should regulate the issues of simplified procedure for establishment of NGOs, preferential taxation, exclusive legal status in dialogue with government structures and quasi-public sector and financing exclusively NGOs in the form of state grants and awards.

In order to improve the quality of services provided by NGOs to citizens, a systemically built infrastructure of NGO support is needed through the creation of NGO houses in the regions with budgetary support from local authorities, as well as creation of specialized training programs within the framework of academic education for training specialists in the public sector with allocation of state grants for such education.

It is also necessary to legislate the obligation of non-governmental organizations to conduct public expertise of draft regulatory legal acts, concepts and strategies affecting the interests of the population – by analogy with the expertise conducted by non-governmental organizations in the business environment. The main thing in this matter is the impossibility of adopting any regulatory legal document in case of absence or negative expert opinion from NGOs.

Mr. Daniyar Kadirov, Vice Minister of Culture and Information, summing up the results of the XI Civil Forum of Kazakhstan at a briefing in the CCS, noted that one of the most important achieve-

ments of independence was a professional, active and independent community of non-governmental organizations.

It was the first civil forum after the constitutional reform. During two days, the forum participants had the opportunity to discuss the most important and topical issues of society, presented their recommendations for development of public consciousness and civic engagement, as well as for further strengthening the partnership between government, business and civil society.

The most striking event, in his opinion, was the plenary session at which Mr. Yerlan Koshanov, Chairman of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan read the welcoming speech of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to the Forum participants.

In general, more than a thousand recommendations have been received within the framework of the Civil Forum, and the result of this work will be the “Action Plan for implementation of the recommendations of the XI Civil Forum for 2024-2025”. The main priority will be making changes and additions to the Concept of Civil Society Development, – stressed the representative of the relevant ministry.



AST

ТЕЛЕ-ОБЕРДІ ДАМУ
КУЛЬТУРЫ И ИСКУССТВА

ТАРИХИ-МӘДЕНИ МҰРАНЫ ҚОРҒАУ
ОҚРҒАНА ИСТОРИКО-КУЛЬТУРНО О НАСЛЕДИЯ

СТАН:
ОГО –
ВИТИЯ
СТВА»

Ақпарат

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«СПРАВЕДЛИВЫЙ КАЗА
И КАЖДОГО – ГЛАВНЫЙ В
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Civil society: evolutionary development and an effective management system

Azamat BAIGALIYEV
Deputy Director of the Institute
of Eurasian Integration



The main trend in the development of successful state in the 21st century is formation of strong and competitive civil society. Gradually, through trial and error, Kazakhstan came to understand that the official government, whether executive, legislative or judicial, is not capable of effectively governing the country alone. We need the support of thousands of non-governmental organizations that create a natural environment for equal discussions and the expression of objective points of view, modeling scenarios and developing optimal solutions.

FROM A SUBCULTURAL PHENOMENON TO A SOCIAL INSTRUMENT

Kazakhstan follows an evolutionary model of civil society development, an important condition of which is presence of effective non-governmental organizations and umbrella structures. This institution was formed under the influence of government reforms (more freedom – more action), political conjuncture (presence of far-sighted managers), social demands (each period has its own needs), economic situation (increase or decrease in funding) and international initiatives (growth or decline of foreign attention to Central Asia).

With the liberalization and decentralization of the state system, a large-scale process initiated by President K. K. Tokayev, within the framework of five reform packages, the role of NGOs will be significantly increased. And here,

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM, THE STATE, AS ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES BECAME AVAILABLE, BEGAN TO BUILD SYSTEMIC MECHANISMS FOR INTERACTION WITH THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

of course, the willingness of the largest organizations to assume full responsibility for the implementation of entire sectors of socio-economic and legal policy will be important. An important impetus for the non-governmental sector will be the further consolidation of two key social concepts of the President in the information and ideological field – “the listening state” and “AdalAzamat”.

From the point of view of retrospective analysis, in the early 1990s, the first and most striking manifestation of civil activism was the social movement “Nevada-Semipalatinsk” under the leadership of the outstanding poet and researcher Olzhas Suleimenov. The closure of the Semipalatinsk test site was a concrete result of the interaction of the state apparatus, the concerned public and international partners.

At the same time, as contemporaries note, there was no consistency and clear policy among other NGOs of that time, which was very logical – the civilian “pioneers” simply did not know how to act in the new extreme conditions. In the eyes of politicians and most citizens, the non-governmental sector seemed to be a subcultural phenomenon, vaguely threatening the monopoly of state bodies on power. It is not surprising that the sphere experienced a significant lack of legal regulation, professional personnel and, of course, financing.

However, by the mid-1990s, the situation began to improve significantly. The first influential non-governmental structures were trade unions and legal organizations that stood up for the protection of employees of enterprises. From 1994 to 1997, the number of NGOs increased dramatically from several dozen to one and a half thousand, which became an important signal of democratization and liberalization of the system. Many organizations have adopted foreign experience, adapted them to local conditions, and also received international grants. And although the issue of foreign financing itself is debatable today, it cannot be denied that these investments have made a significant contribution to strengthening our civil society.

The year 1996 became important for the non-governmental sphere, when the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Public Associations” was adopted. In particular, it defined the legal status, rights and obligations of NGOs. It is noteworthy that the legislative initiative has caused serious controversy in the civil society around the wording that NGOs are equated with political parties, cooperatives of apartment owners and even religious communities. Instead, non-governmental associations were offered to be given a separate status.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the state, as additional opportunities became available, began to build systemic mechanisms for interaction with the non-governmental sector. Moreover, social activists themselves gradually became embedded in people’s daily lives, becoming an integral part of social, educational, legal, inclusive programs, including support for families in need, drug addiction prevention, and assistance to HIV-infected people. NGOs took up extremely inconvenient, sensitive, to some extent marginalized issues that government officials did not get their hands on, but which had to be addressed one way or another.

The role of NGOs was significantly strengthened by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Non-Profit Organizations” adopted in 2001. On this basis, the Concept first appeared, and then the Program of state support for non-governmental organizations of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2003-2005. They identified the main forms of state support for NGOs, in particular, introduced a state social procurements, which became the most applicable tool for financial support of public organizations.

FORUMS, ALLIANCES AND CONCRETE RESULTS

A new page in the development of the non-governmental sector was opened by the holding of the First Civil Society Forum in October 2003, where top officials of the state and representatives of NGOs from all regions of the country gathered. The Government's intentions to delegate serious powers to independent institutions in the fields of environmental protection, improving the quality of health and education, housing and communal services, crime prevention, and poverty reduction were presented on this momentous occasion.

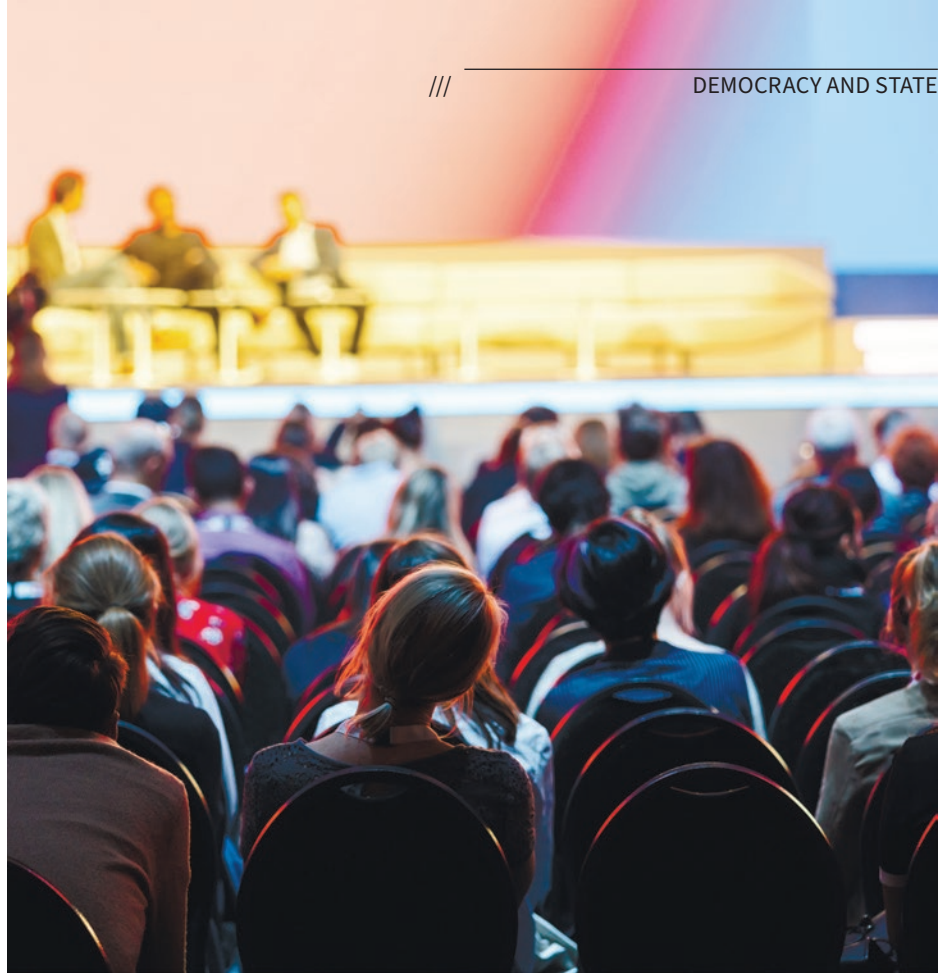
At the second forum, in 2005, the participants came with concrete and significant achievements, as well as ambitious plans for the future. Having achieved tangible results, the social activists managed to prove that they are ready for even more serious tasks and high forms of institutionalization. Thus, a Civil Alliance was created, which brought together Kazakhstan's leading NGOs for an equal dialogue with the state apparatus regarding the launch of long-term programs and improvement of the legislative framework.

One of the new successes of this cooperation was the Concept of Civil Society Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2011. In particular, the document elaborated the mechanism and ensured transparency of the state social procurements, defined the roles and tasks of NGOs to participate in social programs and projects. The idea of an equal partnership between the state and civil society institutions was a common thread in the concept. At the official level, this interaction is recognized as one of the key areas of country policy.

During these years, reputable international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF, WHO, and USAID have continued their activity in Kazakhstan. They not only implement joint consulting and strategic programs with Kazakhstan in various socially significant areas, but also allocate targeted grants to Kazakhstani NGOs. An example of positive and effective foreign support is the activity of the representative office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kazakhstan since 2007, which is one of the leading German expert centers in the field of political development and education. According to the principle of partnership, the foundation has implemented many projects in our country in the system of public administration and the media, as well as provided dozens of grants for students of Kazakhstani universities.



AN EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE AND EFFECTIVE FOREIGN SUPPORT IS THE ACTIVITY OF THE REPRESENTATIVE OFFICE OF THE KONRAD ADENAUER FOUNDATION IN KAZAKHSTAN SINCE 2007, WHICH IS ONE OF THE LEADING GERMAN EXPERT CENTERS IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



FACTORS OF REASONABLENESS AND BALANCE

Over the years of independence, the number of NGOs in Kazakhstan has increased from 100 to 23 thousand (of which more than 18 thousand are active today). A stable and diverse civil non-governmental sector has been formed in the country, which includes political parties, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, ethnocultural and religious associations. They reflect and protect the interests of various social groups, represent the interests of people with special needs in Parliament and Government, improve gender mechanisms, make proposals to laws and defend the positions of young people. Such a wide participation of the civil sector in the work of the state indicates that all the necessary conditions have been created in the country for the active work of NGO leaders and experts.

The anchor organization in this key area is, of course, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, which today covers more than five thousand non-profit associations throughout the country. The Alliance carries out general coordination of NGOs, implements socially significant projects, develops international cooperation and effectively interacts with public authorities. A distinctive feature of the alliance is that it has a wide network of representative offices in the center and in the field.

In recent years, government efforts have been noticeable in terms of ensuring the growth of quality indicators of NGOs. The procedure for opening such organizations is simplified, which allows citizens to actively express their position. Today, the registration period of a non-governmental organization takes only 7-10 days. Every year, 150 or more new public organizations appear in various spheres of society. So, in 2023 alone, the number of NGOs increased by 8.6%. In addition, the Ministry of Culture and Information has created an “NGO Database”, which has increased transparency of activities and streamlined information about all NGOs in Kazakhstan. Legislative possibilities are also developing. For example, the Concept of Civil Society Development until 2030 was adopted, which was discussed at the recent XI Civil Society Forum in Astana.

In general, according to OECD standards, the state should actively get rid of uncharacteristic functions that society can handle better than it. The model where active citizens are involved in socio-political life has long been tested and shows successful results in many prosperous countries. Kazakhstan consistently adopts this experience, acting on the basis of the factor of reasonableness and balance.



Katarzyna Wawiernia: Working with NGOs is an important part of our efforts

The UN Development Program has been implemented in Kazakhstan for 30 years. The result was the implementation of about 200 projects in various spheres of life. We are talking with Katarzyna Wawiernia, UNDP Permanent Representative in Kazakhstan, about how the Organization supports the development of the civil sector as a key element in achieving the SDGs.

– Mrs. Wawiernia, thank you for this interview. Please tell us, which key areas of UNDP work in Kazakhstan could you highlight in particular? How did they affect the lives of Kazakhstanis?

– Kazakhstan has come a long way in 30 years. The implementation of many reforms has led to a significant reduction in poverty, improvement in the quality of services and an increase in the level of human development.

All this time, UNDP has been systematically cooperating with the Government of Kazakhstan. Over the years, our work has been carried out in different aspects, depending on the needs. Today, we are working in four main areas: combating inequality and vulnerability, improving the efficiency and accountability of institutions, promoting economic diversification, supporting low-carbon development and helping to adapt to climate change.

We use global experience and partnerships to bring cutting-edge ideas to Kazakhstan to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. For example, one of the projects that we are proud of is cooperation with the Government on the implementation of the innovative Digital Family Card platform. This is govtech flagship tool, which has become a key element of the Social Code, expanding opportunities to support the most vulnerable social group.

We are actively working on the environmental agenda. From the development of the Concept of “green” economy, in fact, the first vision of the country’s “green” development, to Kazakhstan’s accession to the Paris Agreement and the adoption of Low-Carbon Development Strategy, UNDP provided expert and resource assistance at all stages.

With our support, for example, an interactive Atlas of solar resources for investors was created in Kazakhstan and the first auction with documentation on renewable energy was successfully held, the first “green” bonds were issued and non-grant financial instruments were introduced. These steps have radically changed the country’s green finance market, allowing for additional private investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and biodiversity conservation. In addition, over the past decade, with the support of UNDP, existing areas have been expanded in Kazakhstan and new specially protected natural areas have been created, ecological corridors have been created for the first time, and large-scale work has been carried out to preserve biodiversity.

UNDP is involved in the reform of local self-government in Kazakhstan. We conduct seminars for akims, involving experts who teach how to effectively manage communal property, work with the budget and public procurement to make local management transparent and more effective.

As part of our efforts to strengthen human rights institutions and promote the rule of law, we contributed to the development and adoption of the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On the Commissioner for Human Rights” and supported the training of newly appointed representatives of the Ombudsman in the regions. We have also promoted the introduction of service police course in the academies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and are contributing to the fight against gender-based violence.

This is just a part of large list of areas of cooperation between UNDP and the Government of Kazakhstan. Over 30 years, we have implemented more than 200 projects worth over 200 million US dollars. We support the implementation of civil service and public administration reforms, the fight against corruption and improving the quality of justice, as well as promotion of digitalization.

The work is being carried out on a large scale. UNDP is ready to continue to support Kazakhstan on the path of sustainable development.

– Important element of any mature society is a strong civil sector. How is UNDP developing cooperation with non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan?

– NGOs, of course, play a huge role in the implementation of the initiatives that UNDP promotes in Kazakhstan. Therefore, working with the non-governmental sector is an important part of our efforts. NGOs, in fact, serve as a bridge between the Government, civil society and international organizations such as UNDP, providing the necessary interaction.

NGOs often work on the ground with direct access to social vulnerable groups. They are mobile enough, which allows them to quickly provide assistance to those who need it. NGOs raise important issues of concern to society, influence legislative initiatives and ensure the participation of citizens in discussing and solving social problems.

Today there are about 18 thousand non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan, actively working in various fields. It is a great asset of human capital and expertise. It needs to be developed and expanded, given the potential amount of social and other benefits that this large and interconnected community can provide. Almost a third of NGOs are engaged in supporting socially vulnerable groups, which is consistent with the implementation of the key goal of the 2030 Agenda, ensuring that “no one will be left behind.”

Indeed, we have successful examples of partnership with NGOs, and we hope that this will continue. We were very inspired by the level of commitment and involvement of NGOs in the development of the First and Second Voluntary National Surveys of Kazakhstan in 2019 and 2022. The success of these reports was the result of the consolidation of valuable experience and knowledge provided by the non-governmental sector.

– One of the major areas of work of the UNDP is the fight against discrimination, the promotion of gender equality, and the rights of people with disabilities. Can you tell us a little more about this work?

– Yes, that's right, efforts to achieve gender equality are the main commitment of UNDP. The Organization recognizes that women's empowerment and gender equality are vital to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. They provide for universal respect for human rights and the dignity of the individual, when every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality without legal, social and economic barriers.

We integrate the principles of gender equality into all areas of our work. The focus is on measures that open up more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, be competitive in the labor market, hold leadership positions and unite against gender-based violence. For example, thanks to UNDP, over eight thousand women in Kazakhstan received non-financial support, which allowed them to successfully launch their own business.

As for the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, we are involved in the development of the necessary legislative norms and standards. For example, pilot projects of model apartments fully equipped for people with disabilities according to international standards have been launched in Kyzylorda and Pavlodar with our support. This is such a visual standard for performers. In general, we continue to actively work to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility of any environment for people with disabilities.

– How do you assess the development of the civil sector in our country over the years of independence?

– Kazakhstan has come a long way. Today, many non-governmental organizations and social movements are actively involved in various spheres of public life. There is a permanent public platform where civil society activists, non-governmental and charitable organizations can discuss topical issues, come up with ideas and suggestions. This is a Civil forum.

Observing the scale and speed of the country's development, I highly appreciate the partnership between the civil sector and the state in supporting actions aimed at the sustainable development of Kazakhstan. This cooperation makes it possible to solve urgent problems and overcome difficulties more effectively.

It is important to understand that in order to achieve the SDGs, we need to work together. This is a task that cannot be solved alone. We need a collective force uniting civil society, the state and international organizations. With political will, we can work together to create a greener, more equitable and fairer future for all.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND CIVIL INITIATIVES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED AND DEVELOPED, WHICH PLAY A KEY ROLE IN DISSEMINATING OBJECTIVE INFORMATION AND ANALYZING WHAT IS HAPPENING



– Kazakhstanis have more and more opportunities to participate in public administration. In 2021, the first elections of akims of settlements were held, in 2023 – akims of districts and cities of regional significance. How important is the reform of local self-government for development of the country and the growth of civil responsibility?

– It is very important because it increases the effectiveness of local government, takes into account the peculiarities of the regions, promotes their development taking into account these characteristics, increases civil responsibility through people’s participation in elections and governance.

UNDP supports this reform in practice. As I have already noted, together with the Ministry of National Economy, we have organized training sessions for rural akims. About 2,500 people took part in them, including akims of cities of regional significance, as well as villages, towns and rural districts, from 17 regions of Kazakhstan.

One of the main goals was to help the akims better understand the new expanded functionality of local authorities, as well as to understand the system of direct financing of important projects for the district. The idea was to give rural districts more opportunities to influence what is happening in their geography, decide how to use finances, and even create their own businesses to improve infrastructure.

The development of local self-government makes it possible to ensure fair representation of diverse interests, including vulnerable groups, youth and residents of remote areas.

– Which areas of the civil sector, in your opinion, need to be developed more actively?

– In light of the challenges we face, not only for Kazakhstan, but also for the whole world, the civil sector should become a driving force for solidarity and building trust in society. We need to talk more about strengthening civil responsibility, about actively involving citizens in the discussion and implementation of government programs and policies. Independent media and civil initiatives should be supported and developed, which play a key role in disseminating objective information and analyzing what is happening.

All these measures make it possible not only to increase the transparency and responsibility of government institutions, but also contribute to the formation of more competent, informed, active and engaged society. This, in turn, has a positive effect on the quality of public administration, the effectiveness of state programs and the level of public confidence in the government.

In general, we always support the promotion of the development of the civil sector as a key element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This is not just a priority, but a strategic investment in the future, which directly contributes to improving the quality of life of the population and provides the basis for sustainable and inclusive society ready to face modern global challenges.

Yevgeniy Zhovtis:

Strong civil society is conditional on freedom and democracy



The State is as strong and effective as its civil society is free and independent. We talked with Yevgeniy Zhovtis, Director of the Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights, about how do things stand in terms of civil and political rights in Kazakhstan, why there is no sustainable development without democracy, and the opposition is quite a natural thing.

– Evgeniy Alexandrovich, this year the Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights celebrates 30th anniversary. How has our civil society and the human rights situation changed over the years?

– First of all, it is important to agree on the meanings: civil society is an environment in which free, active, responsible and caring people understand their right to take part in government and have the opportunity to exercise this right – through democratic elections, through interaction with the state and government, through public control and so on. This is an environment in which the norm of the Constitution that “the people are the source of power” is embodied in practice. Civil society is a society that is the subject of public policy, not its object.

In Kazakhstan, it began to form in the late 1980s and early 1990s. First, in the form of informal initiatives of various kinds, and then in the form of certain institutionalization – independent trade unions, opposition parties, NGOs began to appear, and there were independent media. Everything was more or less actively developing, bubbling up until 1995-97, until a certain turn towards greater authoritarianism took place with the new Constitution.

Now, if you look at the ratings, then Kazakhstan, like all Central Asian countries, belongs to non-free states with a consolidated authoritarian regime – we are not a democracy. And unfortunately, it is not even a developing democ-

racy yet. In terms of key parameters of political rights and civil liberties, the rule of law, we are in the second hundred countries, and in terms of freedom of speech and expression – in the last third of the list of states.

One of the objective reasons why this has happened is the unreformed nature of the political system, as well as the key legal institutions of the state. The judicial system, security agencies, law enforcement agencies and the prosecutor's office have retained the Soviet mentality, if you can call it that: this is such a mixture of dependency and paternalism – the state is the most important thing, it knows everything, it sets the rules, and we will enforce these rules by force.

When the Human Rights Bureau was created 30 years ago, we prioritized political rights and civil liberties as a subject of activity.

Because I am convinced that neither economic, nor social, nor any other problems in the state will be effectively solved if people do not have freedom. It's very simple: if you don't have freedom of speech, then you won't be able to even talk about your social, economic and other problems, not to mention, solve them.

Despite the fact that Kazakhstan has been an independent state for more than 30 years, civil society in our country is still in its infancy. There are very few organizations and activists who feel like an equal partner or critic of the state. Few people understand that the government is changing, but people, society, and the country remain, and the state must always act according to certain rules and within the framework of the common good.

As for the human rights situation, it is developing in very different ways. As I have already noted, it is much worse in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Here we continue to maintain the level of serious restrictions both in legislation and in practice. First of all, I am talking about the right to freedom of speech and expression, the right to freedom of assembly and association, freedom of conscience and belief, the right to participate in government, free and fair elections, and so on.

The situation with economic, social and cultural rights is better. You can see some progress here. For example, work is underway to better ensure the rights of people with disabilities, women, and children, and there is some progress in non-politicized issues: in the fight against torture, human trafficking, domestic violence, and so on.

– At one time, you were a member of the Commission on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in the Republic of Kazakhstan. What did you remember about your work in the commission, did you manage to achieve your goals?

– My colleague Zhemis Turmagambetova and I started to raise this issue in 1992-93. It took more than 10 years for a moratorium on the execution of death sentences to be adopted – this happened in 2004. After another 10 years, in 2014, the work reached the next level – the possibility of imposing the death penalty was reduced, some of the articles that provided for such a punishment were removed from the Criminal Code. But they did not want to join the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights yet.

It took almost 10 more years for this to happen: in 2022, the death penalty was removed from the Constitution and in 2023 they joined this protocol. And you know, the arguments that were given in favor of this in 2021-2022 were not much different from those that we cited in 1993.

I am very sorry that the same situation is happening with the solution of many other issues that we raise: yes, some of them find a positive solution, but it takes many, many years.

So despite the fact that the result has been achieved, I cannot say that I am very satisfied with the experience of working in the Commission. It is good that platforms for dialogue are being created, that we can convey our views, suggestions and recommendations, but from the point of view of effectiveness, I am afraid that so far this leaves much to be desired.

– You have a lot of contact with human rights defenders in Central Asia and the entire post-Soviet space. What do we have in common and what are the differences in the field of human rights in our countries?

– All Central Asian countries, as well as all post-Soviet states (with the possible exception of the Baltic states), face the same problems when it comes to civil rights and freedoms and the development of civil society. I have already said how important institutions such as the judicial system, national security agencies, law enforcement agencies, and the prosecutor's office are for these processes – their reform is difficult everywhere.

The Soviet past has left its mark on our societies: people in several generations had nothing to do with democracy at all and do not really understand, and often do not really want to participate in decision-making.

There are differences in how each state has developed politically – and this has directly affected the formation of civil society, fundamental rights and freedoms.

– You speak a lot on the topic of discrimination in Kazakhstan. What exactly is it expressed in and what is the overall relevance of the topic?

– The general problem is that there is no anti-discrimination legislation as such in Kazakhstan at all. There is not even a definition of discrimination that is complete and consistent with international standards. There is a concept of “discrimination” in the Law “On Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women”, but it is very short there.

Discrimination has many different forms, direct, indirect, by association, multiple. In fact, this is when you are dealing with any difference in attitude towards a person, which, all other things being equal, leads to diminution, destruction, and reduction of rights and opportunities. If a Kazakhstani wants to sue someone for discrimination, such person will not be able to do so, because there are no articles of the law on which such complaints can be considered.

This is a big problem and it must be solved systematically. Our Human Rights Bureau, together with a number of experts, developed a draft law, presented it in Astana twice. And now we are cautiously optimistic about the development of the situation, because in the Action Plan in the field of human rights and the rule of law, approved by the President on December 8 this year, one of the points is the creation of permanent working group on anti-discrimination legislation and institutions. That is, the state recognizes the problem and begins to move a little in this direction.

– You are always considered to be in the camp of the opposition to the government. But the goals and objectives of the Bureau are clearly outlined. What’s the catch? Is it possible to talk about positive processes from the point of view of human rights protection in Kazakhstan?

– First of all, you know, it always surprises me that the word “opposition” has such a negative connotation – as if it’s bad. Opposition is quite a natural thing. The presence of the opposition is a necessary condition for political

competition, for the development of democratic processes, and for strengthening civil and political freedoms.

As for the Human Rights Bureau: from the very beginning of our work, we have set ourselves a very clear line – we are not fighting for power. Therefore, we do not participate in elections in any capacity, and we do not support any political parties or forces. Without crossing this “red line”, we oppose the government, criticize it when we think fit.

In general, now the government continues to look at civil society and independent political activity as a threat, and not as a natural process. It is trying to stop these threats by putting pressure on civil society activists and the political opposition, and this ricochets through other independent spheres of civil society.

In fairness, I must say that the authorities are creating more feedback channels, more platforms, trying to improve the efficiency of public administration etc. However, the key task for the authorities is to ensure that all this activity is under control and does not threaten stability, as the authorities understand it.

– Civil society is developing in Kazakhstan before your eyes. How do you assess the work of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan and other public organizations? Please name the pros and cons of their activities.

– If you look at democratic countries, there are no such NGO associations as our Civic Alliance. Because civil society cannot be an object of state policy, it is its subject. And when there is a functioning electoral democracy, this is how it happens, civil society, individual civil society activists and organizations have the opportunity to work effectively independently, promote their priorities and solve problems, including with government representatives. If necessary, they can form a coalition on some issue. They do not need an umbrella created from the above.



The idea of the Civil Alliance appeared, as I understand it, from the desire to create a centralized NGO association, a certain tool for political ideological management of this area, to ensure the development of the non-governmental sector in line with the current state policy.

However, the CAK certainly has positive aspects. First of all, this is a certain access to power, providing feedback between the state and the population, and the opportunity to implement the necessary projects. Many organizations that are part of the SAC perform very important tasks, build good horizontal ties, a civil network appears, and social and other problems are being solved.

– In what areas does the Bureau contact with Kazakhstani NGOs, and how, in your opinion, has the third sector changed in recent years?

– The Bureau has a certain area of interest – it is the protection of political rights and civil liberties – and we are open and work with everyone whose goals and objectives meet ours. We work with dozens, if not hundreds of different NGOs – at the central and regional levels, since the Bureau has branches in 12 regions. In principle, we are in close contact with organizations that deal with social, economic and cultural rights.

As for the development of the “third sector”, first of all, I would like to draw attention to the fact that this term is very controversial and is now being abandoned. It appeared out of an effort to somehow divide and structure the spheres of activity of the state, business and civil society. This division is very artificial and controversial: businesses have public interests, those who work in the public sector have public interests.

Thus, I would prefer to talk more about the development of civil society, of which the “third sector” is a part – as a set of its institutionalized forms.

In the last few years, from 2016-2019, I am pleased to observe that young people have become more active, their socio-political interests have become much stronger, they have become more interested in and care about the common public good, and are interested in politics.

A lot depends on the political context in this process. In order for civil society to develop effectively, political reforms, democratization, inclusivity, tools for interaction between government and society, expansion of space for free and independent expression of opinions, criticism and more opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making are needed.

Aigul Solovyova: The Civil Alliance

should become a strategic partner of the state

The public figure spoke about the formation of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan and how it has changed over the past 20 years.

This year, the XI Civil Forum of Kazakhstan was held. This Forum has been meeting every two years since 2003 and unites representatives of the non-governmental sector from all regions of the country under its banners.

The key organizer of the forum is the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, which has been the largest civil organization of the republic for two decades. CAK acts as a platform for partnership between society, government and business through constructive dialogue, discussion of pressing problems and finding ways to further develop the country.

We talked with Aigul Solovyova, Chairman of the Management Board of the Association of Environmental Organizations of Kazakhstan, one of the founders of CAK, about the creation of this organization and the path it has taken over the past two decades.

– The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan is the largest organization in our civil sector, which unites NGOs throughout the country, and you were at the origins of its creation, being the chairman in 2006-2013. How did the idea of its creation come about, and how did the formation go at first?

– In the early 2000s, the idea of creating an organization that actually performs the role of a

strategic partner of the state, capable of uniting NGOs into a Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan for mutually beneficial cooperation, matured. At the dawn of building an independent state, the situation in society was freer and there were many oppositional groups, not even because they did not like something specific, but because of the principle: everything the government does is bad.

I recall how at that time in Atyrau, which is quite natural, there were many environmental organizations dissatisfied with the creation of threats to the Caspian Sea due to the development of the oil business and the development of deposits. In this connection, they announced an alternative Alliance and, since at that time I was already the co-chairman of CAK, I met with them and tried to convey that we can raise acute issues together. However, without establishing a channel with the authorities in this process, dialogue and trust among themselves, it will be difficult to solve emerging and existing problems. As a result, we agreed to work together.

The process of organizing and joining the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan was complicated, but at the first Civil Forum its creation was announced, where the main thesis was the partnership of government, business and society. At the second forum, I was already the president of the alliance. NGOs approached the Alliance with already started deve-

Aigul Solovyova

Chairperson of the Management Board of ALE «Association of Environmental Organizations of Kazakhstan»



developments and a vision of their active activity, which was not easy to implement. At that time, deputies, heads of government agencies and businesses admitted that for them NGOs and the civil sector were something unknown and even associated with UFOs.

However, the forums began to change the situation, the business community, which considered the work of NGOs as a line in the budget, within the framework of corporate social responsibility, began to offer us a project approach. Interaction with government agencies was mainly aimed at influencing decision-making and introduction of special platforms began for this. Where their representatives at the highest level discussed urgent issues and problems with public figures through organized meetings. Initially, non-governmental organizations were segmented by spheres of activity, such as education, social protection, defense, and so on. Each interested NGO met with relevant ministry.

At the third forum, the report of ministers or their deputies on the work done within the framework of the recommendations of public figures given at the previous Civil Forum was already practiced. So, I can firmly say that the level of contacts was quite high. Since the first forum, the President, the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of the Security Council have always been among the honored

**THE CIVIL ALLIANCE
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CIVIL SECTOR**

guests. I don't even mention the ministers. And representatives of the Presidential Administration have always participated.

With each forum, the potential of social activists increased and cooperation was strengthened in the name of development. In the intervals between them, an analysis was carried out on the basis of quantitative indicators on the dynamics of changes in the structure of NGOs and their achievements. Currently, the social procurement for NGOs has become the norm, but there was a period when we only proved its necessity and worked out the mechanism for its launch. Thanks to social procurement, the structure of society began to transform towards social, educational and consumer-oriented programs that need the support of the non-governmental sector.

The main goal was the accountability of the authorities, development of local self-government and public control to reduce social tension and focus on people's needs.

– **How has the civil sector changed over these 20 years? Has it become stronger?**

– If we rely on the definition of the first concept of the development of civil society and its participants, since I do not quite perceive the subsequent ones, then, in my opinion, it is quite dynamic and inclusive. However, I think it would be more expedient to develop a strategy as a roadmap for successive steps towards achieving the set goal with specific quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The Republican Civic Alliance carries out extensive work on the consolidation of NGOs and uses a large number of mechanisms for its unification and growth. I follow its work and see new approaches, sometimes even of an innovative nature. CAK is open and actively interacts with international organizations and experts from them. They connect interesting information resources in the form of telegram channels with high-quality

content, social networks and other tools, training seminars are held on a wide range of issues. Including work with public councils, representation of regional CAK. I think the issues they raise help make the system better. We have launched an academy for training NGOs – this is a consistent mechanism for involving newly created and improving existing organizations. It helps to increase interest and build up the qualitative potential of knowledge.

The Civil Alliance forms an environment for the growth of real leaders in the civil sector, but the CAK itself must develop horizontal ties taking into account new realities and leadership trends for the civil sector. In this connection, I would like to note that most of the members of CAK are focused on the social order and do not always perform an expert assessment that allows them to work at a different level of public activity. Thus, for example, if we compare it with the civil sector, which grew up in difficult field conditions and CAK grown in greenhouse conditions, then the advantage is on the side of the former, since they are more free and do not follow the lead of state bodies. NGOs that have joined the CAK practically do not use analytics and do not have a decent influence on the level of decision-making, they are characterized by a more delicate position and a policy of compromise.

– Can you tell us about the triad of NGOs, government and business. Have they really become partners?

– Of course, the state and deputies have become more attentive to non-governmental organizations, and the authorities understand the importance, contribution of NGOs and listen to public opinion. The ideas put forward by the public are implemented through the LSI and other mechanisms, such as laws on Public councils and control, charity and sponsorship, as well as others. Businesses, both medium and large, have strengthened their interaction with NGOs and their efforts are obvious, since they used to satisfy the wishes of akimats more. This was the case, for example, in Atyrau: money was allocated for specific objects, and then everything was forgotten, there was no systematic work.

At one time, CAK actively promoted the topic

of separate business budgets for NGOs on the environment, long-term social projects with a focus on a certain result in different directions. The situation has changed during this period and the field for cooperation has expanded, the business is set up for charity and, in general, for projects that will help improve the attitude towards them and their companies in general. It is clear that, for its part, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan acts as a platform for NGO interaction with specific procedures and rules that its members follow. It cannot “absorb” all organizations, but provides assistance for development of useful links between stakeholders and significant initiatives for their implementation.

I am firmly convinced that the Civil Alliance should receive the status of a strategic partner of the state, since it is already fixed in the legislation, especially when working with all interested parties, including the private sector and government agencies to acquire a certain degree of freedom. At the same time, it is necessary to carry out their activities without looking back, for example, even during Civil forums. Not to enter into competition with their own members or just beginning NGOs, and even with regional, district and rural ones, to ensure the quality of the functioning of the public sector.

In addition, CAK should seek the implementation of the idea of a mechanism for implementation of social procurements for the impartial distribution of grants to NGOs for their projects. At the same time, it is possible to give openness, transparency and publicity to this mechanism.

– The XI Civil Forum has already been held this year? How do you assess it and what would you like to wish to those who continue your work on the development of the organization?

– First of all, I would like to wish only success in further work on improving and strengthening horizontal ties in the civil sector. To develop dialogue platforms with experts on the nomination and formulation of competent proposals to build the potential of maturity and qualitative influence in the life of the country.



20 years is not so much in the framework of history, but we need to move forward in the name of development. For my part, I will also provide assistance to the best of my abilities. I will actively participate in this process, because the civil and public position does not leave anyone indifferent, and the mechanisms have already been created to demonstrate their maturity. However, the society, for its part, should be guided by a professional vision and form a mature and adequate position to exert its influence.

The last Civic Forum, in my opinion, proclaimed a noble theme – Sustainable Development Goals. There are 17 of them and they all affect people's interests, and the key ones have long-term effects, such as the fight against poverty, access to education, water, the environment and much more. Therefore, who, if not public figures, should work with this?

Public councils were also discussed at the Forum, since these are not meetings and passive participation, but monitoring of the entire work of state bodies, then officials should respond more actively to their work. In addition, I would like to draw attention to the fact that after each forum it is important to measure the results of achievements using quantitative and qualitative indicators of the progress of changes with an assessment of the degree of influence on the decisions taken by state authorities of various levels and spheres of activity of NGOs, which will allow adjusting their work and its directions.

In conclusion, I would like to wish the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan to receive the status of a strategic partner of the state before the next Forum and acquire financial independence to form instruments of influence at the decision-making level based on the needs of society.

Talgat Kaliyev: Civil society is an agents of change



The image of the future and the contours of the New Kazakhstan are clearly defined – it is an effective state with a strong civil society. What role its institutions play today and what are the prospects for its development – we are talking about this with the director of the Institute of Applied Ethnopolitical Studies of the Republic of Kazakhstan, political expert Talgat Kaliyev.

– Talgat Begimovich, in your opinion, what is the role of civil society and how do you assess its development in Kazakhstan?

– Civil society is the backbone of any nation, its most active part, which is always the engine of any changes in all spheres of life. If the society has decided to take a course for wellness, then activists for promotion of a healthy lifestyle, physical education and sports come to the fore. If a nation wants to become enlightened, then there are activists in the field of education, and so on.

In general, any society strives to improve its life in all areas at the same time. And that's why activists of all stripes are in demand.

Civil society activists should be engaged in all spheres of life, depending on their competencies – someone is building a political party, someone is saving the environment, dealing with domestic violence... And together they are changing society. History is written not by a passive majority, but by an active minority.

Therefore, it is difficult to overestimate the role of civil society in the history of mankind. According-

ly, if today we are talking about Kazakhstan, which is going through a period of large-scale transformation, then ideally civil society is agents of change, capable of creating the very critical mass ready to turn society to some of the most progressive models of development, to new modernized values, to progress.

We live in conditions not only of internal transformation, but also in a transforming world. On the one hand, we see how the old world order is crumbling. On the other hand, as a civilization, we are experiencing a change in social formation, the transition from a post-industrial to a digital society. What its contours will be, no one can predict yet. But we must be ready by rebuilding our consciousness.

– The super-presidential form of government did not contribute to the formation of civic engagement and political culture of Kazakhstanis. The non-governmental sector, of course, existed, but it was rather decorative in nature, and social immaturity manifested itself in society. How much has the “tragic January” changed the situation?

– We came out of a totalitarian society, and at some historical period we were unable to take on the full burden of responsibility. Immaturity and paternalism came to us from Soviet society. There was a vacuum of civil illiteracy, we did not have the skills of civil behavior.

The maximum that society could skillfully demonstrate in the 1990s was the so-called “end-



**KAZAKHSTANIS
DEMONSTRATE
A HIGH LEVEL OF
ADAPTABILITY
TO THE DIGITAL
SOCIETY**



Generally speaking, Kazakhstanis are adapting quite well to this new reality. Visiting foreigners are amazed at the level of digitalization of our society, the fact that almost everyone uses bank payment systems, not cash, registers for flights online, and pays for utilities remotely.

Kazakhstanis demonstrate a high level of adaptability to the digital society. But we must not only be users, we must become active participants in this process, those who will generate IT start-ups, develop their creative class, business elites, creative elites. And these are always agents of civil society.

less mass meetings”, when people went out to rallies and did not hear anyone, including themselves. Not a single rally ended constructively, it was held only in order to show the protest of the authorities and achieve short-term benefits, not long-term changes.

This very vacuum of civil passivity began to be filled by the government, which took over all spheres, including civil control, since civil society itself turned out to be insufficiently capable at that moment.

At the same time, we implemented the Bolashak program, according to which almost 15 thousand Kazakhstanis studied abroad. There was a certain critical mass – representatives of a new generation who wanted to live in a new way.

But the old management model showed an interest in preserving everything. In fact, for the last decades we have been living in conditions of conservation of political, economic and all other processes. There was no circulation of elites, renewal of the managerial class, a certain ruling class was formed, which did not want to give way.

Eventually, systemic contradictions arose, which led to a mass protest. An attempted coup has also been imposed on it.

The mass protest demonstrated the immaturity of civil society. It was uncontrollable, spontaneous. Such a crowd is easy to lead by anyone who has certain techniques. Generally speaking, everything that happened next – the seizure of buildings, looting – is already the result of the use of special psychotechnics and political technologies.

At that moment, there were no reputable actors of civil society who could reach out to the masses and turn the protest into a constructive form of peaceful dialogue. And we got this tragedy. Civil society has not had time to take place by this time, to generate a sufficient number of recognizable, authoritative and trusted leaders.

However, the reforms of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev began in 2019, when he initiated the creation of the National Council of Public Trust, within the framework of which four packages of political reforms were prepared. In this context, neither Kantar nor any other event had a fundamental impact on the reform process.

This process has been carried out consistently and purposefully for four years. On the contrary, there were a lot of events that could have influenced the rejection of reforms – explosions at Arys warehouses, a plane crash near Almaty, a pandemic...

They could be interpreted as the unwillingness of our society to assume some of the powers of the authorities. Nevertheless, the President has been consistent in his plans. The course of reforms not only did not slow down, but gained momentum.

Last year, the Constitution was changed by one third, and in its most conceptual positions – the self-limitation of power, the distribution of powers in the direction of strengthening the Parliament and maslikhats. We have received those fundamental changes that create conditions for formation of strong civil society, the strengthening of the influence of political parties, and the emergence of professional politicians.

– You were a member of the National Council of Public Trust, you are a member of the National Kurultai. Is it possible to be heard?

– Absolutely! Acute discussions on all reforms took place within the framework of the NCPT. All adopted changes are the subject of compromise, the result of heated arguments. Public meetings are just the final part of many discussions in offline and online formats.

The vast majority of our initiatives and proposals have been included in the reform package. Therefore, we can say that representatives of a wide variety of groups and political views were heard.

– There are still a lot of artificially created NGOs that are inactive or openly want to get a job at the state “feeder”. Some of them cannot boast of well-established communication with the population, others lack resources and qualified personnel. What is needed to solve the problems of the civil sector?

– I think, first of all, it is necessary to stimulate charity and sponsorship in the activities of NGOs. It is possible to introduce some kind of tax incentives for entrepreneurs who are ready to sponsor such projects. Thus, to promote the active participation of business in the financing of the non-governmental sector.

This will allow for selection of truly working active NGOs. They will be recognizable, have a serious background and reputation, and, accordingly, enjoy the support of sponsors. While the incapacitated and formally existing NGOs will never be able to raise money on the market.

The state should gradually reduce support measures in order for businesses to assume this obligation. And then business will also become a part of civil society.

– What, in your opinion, contributes to the increase of civil engagement of the population?

– One of the main functions of the non-governmental sector is education, training in civil engagement skills, and more active work in the regions, including to involve new members. This is what will increase the civil engagement of the population, involve citizens in electoral procedures, in monitoring

the activities of the executive and representative authorities in the field and, thereby, increase civil participation in the process of governing their lives and the country.

The role of NGOs in this process is invaluable. If we return to the experience of the Alash Orda, then initially the main idea of the Alashordians was to educate the legally literate population of the steppe. Steppe law, based on the Biy court, was replaced by the institution of volost' judges after colonization by tsarist Russia, and this turned out to be an extremely serious problem for the local population.

The Kazakhs began to be dispossessed of land because they were losing in the courts. And the Alashordians began to engage in legal education. That is, for our society, such activities of politicians and representa-

tives of civil society are traditional.

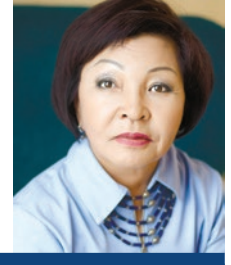
Civil society in Kazakhstan will undoubtedly develop. The question is, on what principle. Will it be transnational based on the principle of international network organizations with a dominant global agenda? Or will it develop according to the domestic principle, or even a mixed one, while simultaneously promoting the global agenda, for example, climate change, and fighting every impromptu landfill in the country?

Definitely, these will be a variety of types of NGOs, and their development will be facilitated by digital technologies. After all, it is elementary, today, in order to hold a meeting, it is enough for NGO representatives to organize a meeting in Zoom. All processes are accelerating, and what took years yesterday can now be done in a few days.



**CIVIL SOCIETY IN
KAZAKHSTAN WILL
UNDOUBTEDLY DEVELOP.
THE QUESTION IS, ON
WHAT PRINCIPLE**





Zhemis Turmagambetova:

Every citizen has the right to be heard

Thanks to constructive dialogue and civic consolidation, our country has achieved tangible results in the political modernization and democratization of the country, seriously strengthening the human rights protection system. Law and order should be the main factor in increasing citizens' trust in the state. And public human rights organizations play a significant role in this. One of the most famous in the country is the Charter for Human Rights, and Mrs. Zhemis Turmagambetova, the Executive Director of organization gave an interview to us.

– Zhemis Utegenovna, your human rights work has been going on for almost three and a half decades. How did it all start?

– In the early 1980s, there was a warming of relations between the state and society. Public groups and political parties were actively created in Almaty. Nina Konstantinovna Fokina and I created, as it was then called, the informal association Almaty Helsinki Group for the implementation of the Helsinki Agreements of 1975.

Then I volunteered to help Mukhtar Shakhanov, who spoke at the first Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR and insisted on creating a special commission to investigate the December 1986 events in Almaty. I joined it and headed one of the working groups.

In 1993, together with Evgeny Alexandrovich Zhovtis, we organized the Kazakh-American Bureau for Human Rights, which was later renamed the International Bureau. At the same time, the first conference on international judicial reform was held in Almaty.

Since then, I have been dealing with the rights of convicts, and not only. In order to increase the number of human rights organizations, I separated and created the Charter for Human Rights Public Foundation on January 1, 2006.

– You were one of the initiators of the moratorium on the death penalty and its abolition. What do you remember about those years of struggle?

– I started this struggle back in 1995, when I saw on the KTK TV channel a story filmed in a pre-trial detention center, how a death sentence is executed by a shot

THE PRESIDENT MADE A STRONG-WILLED POLITICAL DECISION AND SIGNED A LAW ON RATIFICATION OF THE SECOND OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, AIMED AT THE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

in the back of the head. In the 1990s, from 60 to 70 sentences per year were carried out, there was a very large percentage. In terms of the number of convicts per share of the population, our country ranked third in the world after the United States and Russia.

By decree of Nursultan Nazarbayev, a moratorium on the death penalty was introduced on January 1, 2004. The number of articles for which capital punishment was possible decreased and increased, reaching 22!

At first, the government agencies did not understand me, they say, why keep them for life. But I spoke at meetings of the National Council of Public Trust, and in 2020 I was received by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and I outlined my position to him.

As a diplomat versed in international law, the President made a strong-willed political decision and signed a law on ratification of the second optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aimed at the abolition of the death penalty. This step was welcomed in political and human rights international circles. Perhaps 70 percent of the population of Kazakhstan does

not agree with this decision. But nowhere in the world is the abolition of the death penalty carried out by plebiscite, this is a political decision of the President, and we have adopted it.

– They say that the heads of pre-trial detention centers and correctional institutions are more afraid of your inspection than departmental inspections...

– I don't think they are so afraid. You just need to be able to work with them, convince them, and find a common language. After all, we are all citizens of the same country.

I have been conducting this monitoring for almost three decades now and I know what, where and how. Many legislative amendments and changes have been adopted as a result of this work. And if we compare the penitentiary system of the 1990s and 2000s with today, the situation has improved a lot.

The only thing is that we cannot in any way move on to the temporary detention of convicts, they still live in squads. Our correctional institutions have long required not just repairs, but

**ANY PERSON, WHATEVER HE
DOES, MUST BE TREATED AS
AN EQUAL**



demolition. Therefore, yes, if I notice any negative aspects, then I speak about it directly.

As for the convicts, I talk to them calmly, they trust me. Any person, whatever he does, must be treated as an equal. For what they did, the convicts were sentenced to imprisonment. But that's it. Next, we need to think about the fact that they will someday be released and will be in society. A lot depends on what state of mind they come out with, including the mood in society itself.

The creation of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) for the prevention of torture is also the result of monitoring. It is now a lot of people who want to become a participant in it, visit prisons. But sometimes people do not understand that this is not an excursion, it is a hard daily job – meetings, discussions, writing reports, which should eventually lead to an improvement in the situation.

– You have often criticized legislation and law enforcement practice in the field of human rights. How are things today?

– The concept of “Listening state” announced by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made it possible to correct a lot. Not only me, but also other human rights defenders and ordinary citizens had the opportunity to bring their proposals to the authorities.

Today, I can say that we are moving towards sustainable development. The death penalty has been completely abolished, and a law on public control has been adopted.

This year, for the first time, a law was adopted that introduced the concept of ill-treatment and provided for criminal punishment for it. In accordance with international standards, the measures of responsibility for torture and ill-treatment have been differentiated, cases of torture have been transferred to the prosecutor's office, and the investigation of the facts of ill-treatment will be carried out by the internal affairs bodies in coordination with the prosecutor's office. That is, society begins to influence the adoption of certain legislative initiatives and further laws.

– How do you see the dialogue between the state and the non-governmental sector in the near future?

– On December 8, 2023, the President approved an Action Plan in the field of human rights and the rule of law. All the issues raised in it – the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for men and women, the elimination of discrimination against women, the rights of the child, the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, the socialization of persons in detention, the right to freedom of association – were raised by civil society.

The plan fully corresponds to what its representatives said. That is, we are heard by the authorities. In this regard, I am looking forward positively. The only thing is that even on the ground, government agencies do not always understand everything.

Employees of local executive bodies should not sit in offices, but go where people are. But citizens themselves should be more active, not waiting for, as in Nekrasov's case, “the master will come and judge us.” It is necessary to learn to raise questions, to suggest ways to solve them. Public councils were created and we need to work through them. Every citizen has the right to be heard.

– Which domestic NGOs are helping you with monitoring?

– All registered public organizations on human rights interact with each other, there are a lot of such organizations. Currently, monitoring is carried out in police stations, pre-trial detention centers, and temporary detention facilities. There are those who are involved in monitoring in medical institutions, school and preschool organizations. The society was actively involved in solving the accumulated problems, and the authorities began to react to this.

I can name those who started with me and continue to work with me – this is the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, PA “Kadir-kasiyet”, NGO “Aman-sauilyk”.

I hardly know any new organizations, they appear and disappear. After all, this is a grueling job, which not everyone can psychologically withstand from year to year.

Human rights NGOs are considered privileged in some way. But this is not the case. Yes, they are well-known, not only in Kazakhstan, but also in the international community. But they have been working towards this for decades, working hard from misunderstanding to recognition. Perhaps this is our privilege and our strength.



NGOs REGISTERED in KAZAKHSTAN

3500

23 335

1991

2003

2023

The number of NGOs has
increased 6.6 times
over a 20-year period



Almaty – **5017** • Astana – **3554** • Shymkent – **1512**
Karaganda region – **1237** • Kyzylorda region – **1217**



Laila Akhmetova:

Kazakhstan has real public leaders!

Laila Akhmetova is a well-known social activist in Kazakhstan. As a scientist, Doctor of Historical Sciences, professor of political science at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, chairman of the Commission for Preservation of historical memory of the Eurasian People's Assembly, she is engaged in public awareness and educational activities. As a writer and researcher, she has been studying the history of Kazakhstanis who participated in the Great Patriotic War on a volunteer basis for more than 50 years.

The author of books about the defenders of the Brest fortress, about the fighters of the Panfilov division, she restores the names of compatriots, who died on the front and went missing. The professor has already managed to find and perpetuate the names of more than a thousand warriors! This work continues.

– I think that an active life position is developed from a young age. For as long as I can remember, and I will turn 70 in February, I have always been an activist. Already in the first grade, she performed the role of a “nurse” – she checked whether the hands of children entering the classroom were clean. Later she was the chairman of the council of the people's guard, the secretary of the Komsomol committee,” – recalls the beginning of the journey Laila Seisembekovna.

In the foyer of Almaty secondary school No. 36, where she studied, there were photographs of a teacher and six graduates who died on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War. Young Laila wanted to know more about them, began to look for their friends, relatives, neighbors. Over time, her search circle expanded, and by graduation she had collected information about 25 graduates who died in the war. Based on these materials, the school Museum of Military Glory was created.

The young correspondent Laila Akhmetova published the first notes about her searches in the newspaper “Friendly Fellows”, where her father brought her at the age of 12. She conducted broadcasts of the children's edition of the Kazakh radio. She received the Young naturalist gold medal at VDNKh (Exhibition of Economic Achievements) in Moscow for her scientific work. In other words, she demonstrated inquisitive mind and extraordinary abilities already in her school years.

As a student, Laila became a winner of the All-Union Student competitions of scientific papers three times (the only one in the USSR!), headed the international friendship club “Red Carnation” and the students' trade union committee.

– Therefore, it is no coincidence that I continued to engage in public activities in already sovereign Kazakhstan. I can compare scientific and public

work both in Soviet Union and in independent Kazakhstan, there were pros and cons everywhere. But I have been an active citizen at all times,” – our heroine admits.

In 1993, at the suggestion of her colleague Kazbek Kazkenov, she created her first public organization “Ant” (“Oath”), which was engaged in military-patriotic education of young people. At that moment, the non-governmental sector was just emerging, no one had any experience. Since the actions took place in Almaty, which was then the capital, the Ministry of Justice, which was located there, provided great consulting assistance.

– I went through all the stages on my own. I had to study financial activities. Although I already had financial experience as chairman of the trade union committee of students, and since 1993 – chairman of the trade union of employees and faculty of KazNU. In addition, I worked as the head of the pioneer camp at our university. In the public sector, everything was unfamiliar. Although we did not see the money, it was necessary to hand over the “blank sheets”, there was strict responsibility for everything, – says Laila Seisembekovna.

No one was interested in patriotic movements at that moment. This was far cry from human rights organizations, they were the ones who enjoyed authority! The search work was frowned upon.

As my interlocutress recalls, in 1992, the positions of political instructors in the army, deputy principals at schools and vice-rectors for educational work at universities were removed. They decided that the educational function was no longer needed, and this, according to Akhmetova, was a big mistake of the state.



**IT WAS ONLY IN 1999 THAT THEY
CAME TO THEIR SENSES, BUT THE
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UP IDEALLESS, WITHOUT THE PUBLIC
SPIRIT**

– It was only in 1999 that they came to their senses, but the whole generation was brought up idealess, without the public spirit. Nevertheless, I had an organization that few people paid attention to. I was quietly engaged in search and archival work, – she shares.

In 1996, Laila Akhmetova created the Union of Women of Intellectual Labor, because the gender issue was acute then, as, indeed, it is now. In 2003, she became the organizer of another public association – Yerazamat. A year later, Akhmetova became the head of the Almaty Confederation of Non-Governmental Organizations (ACNGO) “Ariptes”. All these projects were successful at the time and fulfilled their tasks. At the same time, the first books about NGOs were published in the country and Almaty.

Over the decades of independence, the non-governmental sector in Kazakhstan has experienced ups and downs. Large-scale reputable organizations and one-day NGOs were created. Those who worked quietly for a certain group of people

and did the right thing. Those who openly brazenly latched onto the federal treat.

In general, non-governmental organizations have been working all these years, fulfilling their mission, and helping to solve issues that the state could not solve in a timely manner. Despite all the problems – lack of resources, qualified personnel, and experience – NGOs helped out in the most difficult areas.

– It is not enough just to create NGO. You need to be a leader, to know that, especially at the beginning, there will be no money, and at the end there may not be any. But you have to work, even for free, that is, to be a volunteer, – explains the social activist. – Kassym-Jomart Tokayev defines the image of the New Kazakhstan as an effective state with a strong civil society. And we have a really strong one! There are activists in Kazakhstan, real leaders. The older generation was able to raise young leaders of civil society. They are now members of public councils, analysts, and political scientists. For example, the tragic January 2022 made it clear who is who. It was the leaders of public opinion, and, first of all, the older generation, who then did a lot to prevent further tragic events in Almaty.

Unfortunately, not all citizens, but already the majority, understand that without a developed civil society we will not be able to build a Just Kazakhstan, Laila Seisembekovna believes. It is necessary to cultivate in people this sense of responsibility not only for their lives, but also for the society that surrounds them.

Our heroine herself, back in 2015, having completed another project, decided to remain only a consultant in the non-governmental sector and devote herself entirely to search and archival work and, as a result, to writing books.

– I am a professional in this, I have a lot of archival data. Every year I continue to travel and work in the archives, because all this, all historical memory must be left to people. That is why I help NGOs as an older friend, I advise everyone who comes to me – she says.

**IT IS NOT ENOUGH JUST TO CREATE
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YES, TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PRAGMATIC, THEY READ LESS, BUT THEY ARE MORE TECHNOLOGICALLY SAVVY

Finally, I asked this smart, caring woman to share her life rules. As it turned out, Laila Seisembekovna has a lot of mottos, which were mainly formed back in the 1990s, when people did not understand a lot and were looking for objectives.

– Then I formulated a number of rules for myself, which I follow. My civic position is based on three “P’s” – probity, patriotism, professionalism. Also, one of my mottos in life was formulated from the words of the great Abai – “Adam bol!” And, of course, “Lead the way!” Who, if not me, the daughter of front-line soldier, will collect the history of war veterans for descendants? It must not be forgotten.

Laila Akhmetova continues to engage in search work, mostly at her own expense, since sponsors for such projects are infrequent. She appeals to everyone to preserve the history of Kazakhstan – both ancient times, and the recent brightest XX century, and the last years of independence.

– It’s easy to throw stones into the past, but your relatives lived there – great-grandfather, grandfather, father... We all tend to make mistakes. We are now starting to criticize the history of 10 or 20 years ago that has just passed away. And where were you when all this was happening? – Our heroine wonders.

I would like to believe that her students, undergraduates would be able to adopt this philosophy of hers and the desire to preserve historical memory. The professor herself is pleased with the current youth. Yes, today’s young people are pragmatic, they read less, but they are more technologically savvy. Every second of them is engaged in social activities.

Even volunteering for young people is the same job that they are ready to do in their free time. When there is such an example as the writer and professor Laila Akhmetova, we can feel secure about the future of civil society.



Lyazzat Kaltayeva:

Embracing inclusion through maintaining equal dialogue



Recently the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan has established the Council on Inclusion, led by Lyazzat Kaltayeva – the first deputy with a disability in the history of our country. She has a huge experience of public activity. More than 20 years ago she created and for a long

time led the ‘Shyrak’ Association of Women with Disabilities and was the inspirer of many important and necessary projects. In the first issue of our magazine we are pleased to talk to Lyazzat Kaltayeva about the development of inclusion in our society.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, WE NEED TO STOP SEEING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS AN ANOMALY AND INSTEAD RECOGNIZE THEM AS INTEGRAL MEMBERS OF MODERN CIVILIZATION.

– Lyazzat Moldabekovna, could you tell us how your social activity began? What motivated you to step outside your comfort zone and dedicate yourself to helping others?»

– My public activity began in 1987, when I was 17 years old. Back then, the first independent associations for people with disabilities were emerging, and I was burning with a desire to make a positive impact on our lives. I dreamt of freely navigating city streets, pursuing sports, traveling, learning, and working alongside everyone else.

For two years I worked as a secretary, then as a deputy chairman of the district society. However, very soon I realised that all this work was only about distributing charity, leaving people trapped within their homes.

My friends and I organized informal meetings to provide a social outlet, go out into nature. But it was all ad hoc. The issues we cared deeply about, especially, the women’s stuff – reproductive rights, deciding your own path, remained unresolved.

In 2000, I had the fortune to participate in an international seminar and visit Finland. There, I witnessed the openness of society and the active involvement of people with disabilities, as well as the considerable efforts made by women to protect their rights. This experience inspired the decision to establish the ‘Shyrak’ Association of Women with Disabilities, dedicated to championing and advancing the rights of women with disabilities. We formulated the vision for our organization: a society where everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential, irrespective of gender or disability.

– You became the first disabled MP in Kazakhstan history. Did you find it difficult to get used to the new role? Do you manage to combine your deputieship with public activities? What tasks do you set for yourself in this position?

– By the time the President appointed me to the Senate of the Parliament, I had already gained valuable experience in the realm of political activity. I ran twice for the Maslikhat of Almaty city and was elected as a deputy of the VI convocation from 2016 to 2021. While this prior experience proved beneficial in the Senate, the increased workload, heightened public significance, and the weighty responsibility bestowed upon me presented new challenges, demanding a distinct level of dedication and approach to my duties.

While my colleagues lead the ‘Shyrak’ Association, diligently contributing to their roles, my primary focus is channeled into my work within the Parliament. Like other senators, I am tasked with deliberating on a multitude of laws spanning various aspects of our state and society. Simultaneously, I strive to shine a spotlight on the pertinent issues faced by individuals with disabilities that can find resolution through legislative measures. In this context, my optimism is directed towards the Senate Council on Inclusion.

– Since 2011, the Association created by you has been working to increase the public and political participation of people with disabilities in society. How do you assess the introduction of a 30 per cent quota in the Mazhilis?

– Yes, we worked systematically on this issue: we conducted studies and surveys, analysed the situation in our country and other countries, and organised round tables and conferences. One of the results of this work was the introduction of a 30 per cent quota in the Mazhilis and party lists, which includes representation of women, young people and people with disabilities.

We can argue a lot about how acceptable it was to lumping all three groups into one quota and its practical efficacy. But one thing I can say for sure: the 2023 elections showed that our society, voters, voting for self-nominated candidates, gave their votes for middle-aged and non-disabled men. While women, young people and six deputies with disabilities came to the Mazhilis through party lists.

That is, as long as our society lives with the old stereotypes about the «standard» politician, as long as it has not matured to recognise the ability of young people and women to run the state, as long as it is not ready to see people with disabilities at the decision-making table – until then, the quota is simply necessary.

– On your initiative, the TenQogam Centre for Social Support of Persons with Disabilities was opened for the first time in Kazakhstan, where experienced lawyers and psychologists provide advice. But beyond that, how do we foster this whole leadership culture among people with disabilities?

– First and foremost, we need to stop seeing people with disabilities as an anomaly and instead recognize them as integral members of modern civilization. Back in the day, before modern medicine, prosthetics, social support, and accessibility, many simply didn't make it. But today, thanks to incred-

ible scientific advancements, living a fulfilling life with a disability is absolutely possible, and quality-wise, it can be just as vibrant as anything else.

Today, progress and scientific breakthroughs not only make life possible for people with disabilities but also enable a quality of life that's comparable to those without disabilities. The key lies in ensuring equal opportunities and dismantling existing barriers. The visible presence of people with disabilities in various aspects of life, whether on the streets, in workplaces, schools, universities, playgrounds, or shopping centers, is becoming increasingly common. What's essential is to showcase individuals with disabilities as not just role models, but as competent professionals, devoted parents, accomplished athletes, successful entrepreneurs, influential bloggers, and adventurous tourists – ordinary individuals with ordinary desires, dreams, failures, and successes. It's about moving away from portraying heroic or idealized images and,

WHAT'S ESSENTIAL IS TO SHOWCASE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AS NOT JUST ROLE MODELS, BUT AS COMPETENT PROFESSIONALS, DEVOTED PARENTS, ACCOMPLISHED ATHLETES, SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS, INFLUENTIAL BLOGGERS, AND ADVENTUROUS TOURISTS



instead, integrating stories of everyday people into the fabric of society, making them relatable to everyone.

– You are in favour of giving people with disabilities the opportunity to earn money in addition to increasing their benefits. Why is that important?

– Certainly, I firmly believe, even though it unfortunately brings some criticism my way, that in any society, irrespective of its economic development, covering all the needs of an individual solely through disability allowances is an impractical proposition. There are two key reasons for this perspective.

Firstly, from an economic standpoint, relying solely on disability allowances is not feasible. Secondly, as individuals' economic circumstances improve, their needs naturally expand. This is a positive phenomenon; people should aspire to live in more comfortable conditions, engaging not only in medical treatment but also in travel and creative pursuits. To achieve this, it's essential for individuals with disabilities to enter the open labor market, earn income, and potentially establish their own businesses.

This is not a simple issue. It requires serious and responsible decisions, preparing people for work, expanding their opportunities, encouraging employers, creating a barrier-free environment. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on those who are currently studying at colleges and universities and are aimed at real employment.

– What is your overall assessment of the development of civil society in our country and the civic activity of our citizens?

– We are living in a time of growing civic engagement. Look at how quickly signatures are gathered for petitions, how strongly the public reacts to cases of injustice and illegality by administrations and agencies, and how a blogger can organize large fundraising events for the treatment of a sick child in a single day. For me, civil society is not just non-governmental organizations and public associations. In many ways, civil society has «settled» in social media in the form of activists, often far outpacing government bodies in speed and efficiency. Here, the main thing is to listen and hear, to react, to find bridges and maintain equal dialogue, which is what our government is trying to do today.

Bakhytkul Yelchibayeva: Helping people – the meaning of life

Making life in rural areas better is the goal of all projects implemented by the Foundation of Local communities. Mrs. Bakhytkul Yelchibayeva, the executive director of the public foundation sees her own mission precisely in supporting and promoting the villagers.

Bakhytkul Yelchibayeva
The Executive Director of the
Public Foundation



Bakhytkul Kazezbayevna is a teacher of the Kazakh language and literature by profession. She spent 12 years at the D. Konayev secondary school in the Yenbekshikazakh area of the Almaty region. As a deputy director, she did a lot to introduce new methods into the educational process, enjoyed great authority.

– But in 2007, I realized that I had fulfilled all my teaching potential that I could give to the school. I wanted to develop, to learn something new. I took a chance and applied for the position of director of the public foundation, although at that time I had little idea what the non-governmental sector was. But I have always been active, and, apparently, the organizers of the competition liked my life position,” our heroine recalls with a smile.

We started with a room of 20 square meters and a team of three people. The social activist went through a good school at the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia, which established a new NGO and accompanied it for three years. It was there that they learned how to develop and implement projects, set goals and achieve results.

The year 2011, when the Foundation of Local Communities branched out on its own, was the most difficult. At the same time, it became clear that its employees were able to act independently.

“We have been working with Bota Foundation for almost four years, and with Philip Morris Kazakhstan for 10 years, and this is an indicator of full mutual understanding and effective cooperation,” says Bakhytkul Kazezbayevna. – I consider honesty, openness, conscientiousness to be the components of our success, and, of course, the fact that we live among people we help, we know their requirements and needs well. After all, the problems of the villagers are often dealt with by everyone except themselves. And how can people living in the city talk about the lives of those who live in the countryside? That’s our thing. At the same time, we have the resources and experience that allow us to work with international organizations.

Very quickly, the Fund of Local Communities became the largest non-governmental organization in the region. Today, there are 10 coordinating managers on the staff, over 60 large-scale projects worth hundreds of millions of tenge have been implemented to increase civil engagement, protect vulnerable social group, and promote rural entrepreneurship.

– Our most significant program is the development of rural regions. We are proud that we were able to bring it to such a good level. In fact, this is



the development of human potential in rural areas, when a simple farmer can be brought to create a full-fledged business and interact with large partners. This experience can be scaled up in any region of Kazakhstan, because it is aimed at improving the quality of life. We are already doing this in Atyrau and West Kazakhstan regions and we hope that the government, having seen the effectiveness of our project, will replicate this experience to other regions,” – says the director of the fund.

We are talking about Shelek Farmers project. In 2015, four farms in the area decided to merge, and today it is an impressive cooperative of 35 farmers. They directly supply berries and vegetables to super-market chains, restaurants and processing plants.

Agricultural cooperation is the future, the fund

notes. Kyrgyzstan is ahead of us in this matter and can serve as an example for Kazakhstani farmers, who amounts to over 50 thousand farmers in the Almaty region alone.

Agribusiness center for farmers and individual entrepreneurs has been opened in Shelek settlement with the assistance of the fund, where courses on agricultural techniques of growing vegetables, marketing, computer and accounting literacy are organized on a permanent and free basis. Villagers get access to government programs to promote and support small and medium-sized businesses. The FLC also implements its own programs to protect the rights of vulnerable social groups, youth, and draws attention to the problems of people with special needs and migrant workers.



During the fund’s work, farmers began to use 25 advanced agricultural technologies. The development of alternative energy sources is a great pride. Farmers were trained to create biogas plants and use organic fertilizers, use solar panels and solar collectors to maintain a certain temperature in greenhouses. There are demonstration facilities in the Agribusiness Center, and two dozen farms have already successfully used renewable energy sources.

– There is such a stigma that only scientists can do this, that technical knowledge is necessary, but for the villagers it is too abstruse and expensive, and it is better for them to continue living with their stove. Our task is to show that this is far from the case, that renewable energy sources are affordable, simple, and any farmer can put them on his farm,” – Bakhytkul Kazezbayevna explains the advantages.

Another successful program is related to the development of women’s entrepreneurship. Employees of the fund teach leadership and demonstrate their own experience – they develop themselves and develop the environment in which they live.

– For five or six years, a certain number of women have accumulated with whom we work – deputies of maslikhats, small businesswomen, owners of fitness clubs, shops. This year, a project

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was implemented in the Almaty region, where new communities of women have now appeared. However, we must understand that there cannot be many beauty salons in one village. Local executive bodies also cannot finance the same and identical facilities. Therefore, together we are looking for and analyzing innovative projects that do not exist in this region,” – says our heroine.

According to her, women really need support – motivational, moral, psychological. After all, a woman entrepreneur should not only have financial literacy and business skills. She needs to combine her favorite business, business trips with raising children, and even manage to develop herself.

– This is a big burden of responsibility and workload. And our task as leaders of the local community is to support them at a certain stage. Even at the stage when she has achieved some kind of result and wants to show off. We are creating such a “moment of glory” for her. Any woman who once embarked on the path of development will no longer be able to live differently, she will try again and again, and we want to help her not to leave this path,” – Bakhytkul Yelchibayeva sincerely says.

A social activist can rightfully be proud not only of successful projects, but also of her students. This is further proof that the non-governmental sector, in which people like her, dedicated people, work, is becoming the most popular.

– Sometimes I wonder if it is time to retire, take care of my grandchildren and myself, – admits Bakhytkul Kazezbayevna. – But then I realize that so much has already been passed and done that I have no right to stop. It has become the meaning of my life, it gives me an understanding that life has not been lived in vain. I am sure that a person in any position should do his/her job honestly and conscientiously. I believe that I am doing a good thing.



For more than 20 years, Zhaksygul Makhanbetova has been engaged in public activities, created and led the Civil Alliance of the Mangystau region for ten years, now heads the Public Foundation «Center for Civil Initiatives of Mangystau». And all these years, she has been protecting the interests of citizens and NGOs, raising topical issues in the region and seeking their solution.

Zhaksygul Makhanbetova: Full partner of the state and business

Zhaksygul Shakhzadayevna was actively engaged in social work from an early age – both at school and at the Karaganda Cooperative Institute, from which she graduated with a degree in “commodity expert and trade organizer”. In 1997, she taught at a vocational school in Almaty and worked for the Public Foundation “Zhastar zhetikteri” (“Achievements of the youth”). Then she was invited as a coach to the program of economic education in schools, according to which she was supposed to train coaches for teachers of schools with the Kazakh language of instruction.

– I had a great sense of responsibility, the realization that I can do something useful for the country, and I fulfilled this mission – for five years I trained economics teachers not only in Mangystau, but also in Atyrau, Almaty, Kyzylorda, South Kazakhstan regions. In 1998, the Ministry of Education

and Science introduced economics curricula in schools. We were given the green light and financial support was provided by multinational oil companies. The trainings were free for teachers,” – recalls Zhaksygul Shakhzadayevna.

In 2000, she was offered to open a regional center of Zhastar Zhetikteri Fund in Aktau. It was the beginning of an important chapter of her life, which is being written to this day.

I planned to live there three years, but stayed forever. As a creative person who needs freedom of action, she really liked this job. She was full of ideas, and most importantly, she could bring them to life.

For example, students of her mentored teachers already participated in international tournaments on modeling economics and management online at that time. In the early 2000s, when the Internet was

not everywhere, it was something unimaginable!

Makhanbetova worked closely with government agencies – shared her experience in raising funds by NGOs for their projects, conducted trainings for local NGOs, teaching them to write projects and attract money from oil companies.

At the very beginning of the journey, OKIOC (later Eni and NCOC) supported her and gave her the opportunity to show what she can do. Because many people looked with doubt at the fact that some kind of public organization takes on such a responsibility – to train teachers. But over time, the positive experience convinced everyone.

– At the same time, I opened a language training center, I needed to maintain an office, I already had a team of teachers who had been trained. And in 2005, I was invited by the head of the regional department of internal policy and offered to go to Astana literally the next day, and even at my own expense. And I went! I got to the founding conference of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, where the need to unite NGOs was discussed so that they could build a dialogue with government agencies and business. We were given a package of documents and instructed to create branches of the Civil Alliance in the regions, – says Zhaksyngul Shakhzadayevna.

It was in July, and already in August she convened active NGOs in the region for a founding conference, where she was elected as president of ALE “Civil Alliance of the Mangystau region”. The field of her activity and responsibility instantly expanded, and she had to cooperate with all departments and local executive authorities.

I studied literally on the go, trying to thoroughly understand all the subtleties of the concept and strategy of CAK, attending conferences and seminars in Astana and Almaty. Of course, it was not easy, government agencies did not take the new structure seriously for a long time.

– I explained that we protect the interests of citizens, build a civil society. And in response, they say, why? What resources do you have? And I had nothing but the charter and the seal. But the state program of NGO support for 2003-2005 was adopted, as well as the law on state social procurement, and with these documents I went to the Depart-



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ment of Internal Policy and proposed to provide funding. Thus, the budget for 2006 included funds for social projects of NGOs, – our heroine shares. – There were a lot of obstacles, checks by law enforcement agencies. After all, we began to raise acute problems – utilities, tariffs, school accessibility, and increase in gas prices. We were supported by journalists from local and republican media, who turned out to be indifferent to these problems and covered all the initiatives of the Civil Alliance. And then the population believed us, and they started contacting us.

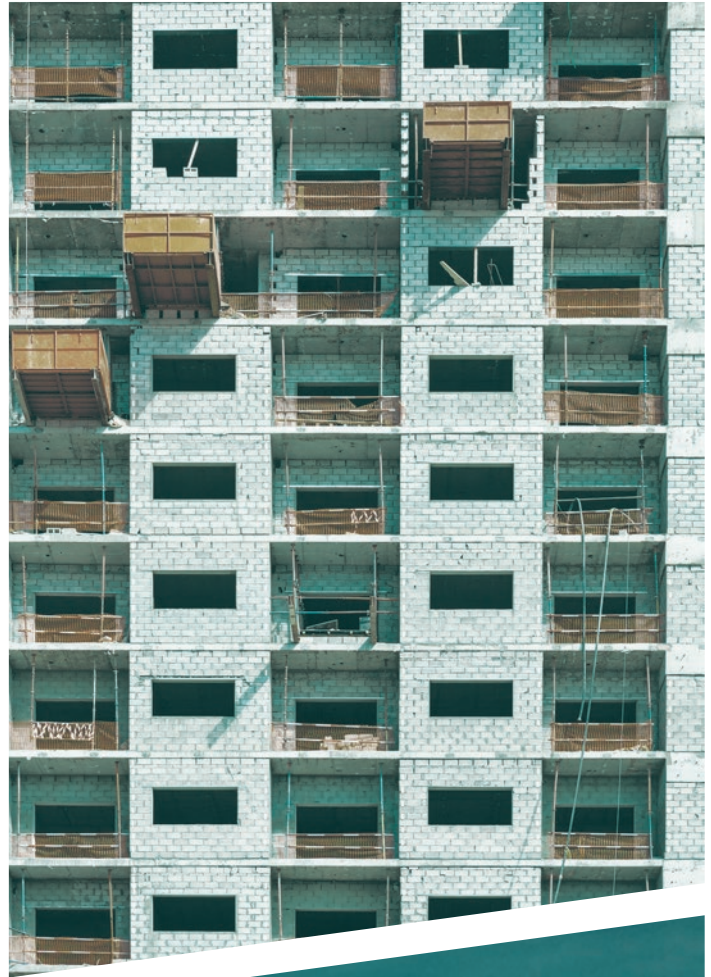
One of the hot topics was the transportation of schoolchildren. Parents complained that children were forced to travel to the suburbs like herrings in barrels, although a lot of money was allocated for this.

Zhaksygul Makhanbetova organized a real advocacy campaign, held dialogue platforms in the format of a round table. The press was actively involved. And as a result, public figures proved that the state, represented by the city akimat, does not control the quality of services provided.

When asked if there were any fears of speaking out against anyone, she answered:

– I had no fear. Our region has always been democratic, we are used to telling the truth to the face. Besides, there were experienced partners, lawyers, and journalists nearby. The carrier sued me as the head of the Civil Alliance and demanded compensation for moral harm in the amount of five million tenge. We won in the court. The news about us spread throughout the Kazakhstan.

Zhaksygul Makhanbetova raised many young professionals who eventually created their own





public organizations and became leaders of civil society. The Civil Alliance under her leadership facilitated the opening of about 60 NGOs in the Mangystau region!

In 2020, she was invited to the project office at the regional akimat. But the civil service did not “put a hook in her” as much as public activity. And a year and a half later, she returned to the non-governmental sector, reviving the Public Fund “Center for Civil Initiatives of Mangystau”, which was once created by a colleague. Today, Zhaksyngul Makhanbetova is a member of commissions and councils under state bodies, as well as the regional Public Council.

– Public activity means participation in working groups, in councils, in public control and monitoring. Our experience, intellectual resources and time are devoted to protecting the interests of society and non-governmental organizations, which become generators and initiators of ideas. Our task is also to communicate to the citizens that not only the state is responsible for the future of the country, but also each of us. In order for citizens to actively participate in the life of the country, they need a platform where they can express their ideas, and not wait for the state to do something. And NGOs have become such a platform. People’s consciousness is changing, they want to be heard. But in order not to receive spontaneous speeches, it is important to give them the opportunity to constructively convey their opinions. The ultimate goal is to build an active and responsible civil society that can become an equal partner of the state and business. That’s what we’re working on.



OUR TASK IS ALSO TO COMMUNICATE TO THE CITIZENS THAT NOT ONLY THE STATE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY, BUT ALSO EACH OF US. IN ORDER FOR CITIZENS TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF THE COUNTRY, THEY NEED A PLATFORM WHERE THEY CAN EXPRESS THEIR IDEAS, AND NOT WAIT FOR THE STATE TO DO SOMETHING. AND NGOS HAVE BECOME SUCH A PLATFORM

QUICK ROUND OF QUESTIONS: CIVIL SOCIETY IS...



**Meiram Raganin, 57 years old, PhD,
Candidate of Medical Sciences,
dentist, President of the NGO “Expert
Community of Dentists”**

– In a steadily developing society, there should be a strong government and a strong civil society. We have already created a strong government, but we do not have a strong civil society.

I have worked in non-governmental organizations more than once, so I know their activities from the inside. And I think that citizens should participate in the life of the country or at least delegate their powers to someone, for example, NGOs. And if a non-governmental organization raises any problem, then a citizen needs to fully support it and stand on its side, give, as they say, his vote for it.

There should be strong non-governmental organizations in the country that enjoy authority

in society, monitor trends in government, in everyday life and ensure that citizens' rights are not violated. If these rights are violated, NGOs should speak out about it. And every citizen should support or not support this NGO.

Only in this case we will become a strong civil society, which we dream of and without which we will not be able to develop. In a normal society, a counterweight to strong government and a strong civil society is needed. If one of these components subsides, it will not allow the country to develop further, it will slow down. Therefore, I believe that every citizen should closely monitor the policies of NGOs, and, if necessary, support them in every possible way.

Nazar Abinov, 50 years old, lawyer of the Bar Association of Astana city

The association of property owners can be considered as the most striking example and cross-section of our civil society. It is created by ordinary citizens who own property to service, manage and maintain the life of the house.

The APO is completely independent, self-financed, and no one has the right to interfere in its activities. Every problem at home is solved directly by the citizens themselves through voting, meetings and polls.

Being a direct participant in the APO, as well as a lawyer, taking part in disputes between citizens and the board of the house, I can say that civic activity in our society is quite low. While the problem does not affect anyone specifically, residents absolutely do not care who manages their house, where their money is spent and what happens to the common property.

The inertia of citizens leads to the fact that people in the board feel that they are not under control, begin to abuse their rights, do not fulfill their direct duties, use money for other purposes, and in many cases engage in banal theft. As a result, utilities wear out and the house falls into disrepair.

After numerous accidents, more active residents begin to wonder why the house has been brought to such a state, and a protest arises. The current authority is trying to hold on by all means, fearing punishment. And to justify its inaction, it invents a million reasons, insults activists. And, as a rule, there are very few of them in the LRRC.

Of course, it is possible to re-elect a new chairman and board members who, at first, roll

up their sleeves and eliminate acute problems. But then the same thing happens. The power spoils people, the temptation is great. But next time there will be more activists. The worse the situation in the house, the more citizens with an active position.

The government did the right thing by not interfering in the relations of the residents of the housing complex, because this is where people's civil responsibility is forged. Until the citizens themselves can restore order in their home, they cannot interfere. In 5-10 years, people will realize that the well-being in the house depends on them, and they will participate more actively in its life. This is a great idea that can be transformed into the life of the whole state.



**Yulia Polonskaya, 39 years old,
journalist**

If you pay attention to the biographies of famous personalities, you can see that most of them started their careers with community service or volunteering. And this pattern, in my opinion, is based on a simple fact: involvement in NGO activities fosters civic empathy, responsibility and a clear understanding that a lot really depends on your personal contribution in modern society.

As a student, I happened to work in a public organization – the Association of Entrepreneurs of Astana. It was my initial work experience, which gave me the first ideas about relationships within the team, achieving goals, and my place in society.

We often hear that all conditions have been created in Kazakhstan for the development of civil society. But you need to understand that each of us is a part of it and a reflection.

Twenty years ago, the office of the Association of Entrepreneurs was adjacent to other NGOs. Our goal was to help beginners and experienced businessmen by providing legal advice and accounting support.

The tasks of the neighbors covered issues of social and material assistance to various groups of the population. These were mothers of disabled children, those with many children, those who raise children alone. They joined together to solve pressing problems together.

Women learned the legal subtleties, understood the basics of commercialization of projects, held fairs, and created small production facilities. They were clearly aware that no one but them could help their children. And they saw their tasks not in going to rallies, but in inviting government agencies to partner.



A truly breakthrough phenomenon for the Kazakh civil society was the adoption of laws on NGOs and the state social procurement, which allowed this partnership to be implemented in practice. The State has received loyal allies represented by NGOs in the implementation of important social projects. And public organizations – recognition of their contribution on an institutional basis. Many of these NGOs are still working today, inspiring them to take responsibility for their own destiny.



Aizada Zhumasheva, 31, entrepreneur

– Civil society is, in my opinion, a people who, by their behavior, attitude and reaction, can influence the state and manage processes that are important for the whole country.

Some kind of law is being passed by Parliament. Time is passing, and the moment comes when you need to make changes to it. This can be done by initiative groups, as well as by the Parliament itself or the Government. But when state institutions are inert and do not want changes, being content with the status quo, then society is the agent of change.

We have enough non-governmental organizations, but how much influence can they have? I think so far in our country, the leaders of change are individuals. Not the organization as a whole, but the leader. Although in developed countries, NGOs may be no weaker in terms of influence than a political party or a legislative body.

There was a case recently: more than 150,000 people signed an online petition for tougher penalties for domestic violence. And what was the result on the part of government agencies? They considered that there was a violation, since the petition was launched two years ago, and it

was picked up only after the high-profile murder of wife by a former official. And there was no progress with this petition.

This is where our NGOs should work! We must show how important this is, how ready we are to change for the better. Every citizen is obliged to be interested in something and express his opinion, and not live by the principle “they will decide without me.”

Every year I get more and more interested in environmental issues in our country. Plus, I am concerned about the issues of education (at all levels) and financial literacy of the population.

I see that the beneficiaries of leaving everything as it is and not changing are specific people in power. This is to their advantage, and they are hindering legislative changes and increasing the maturity of civil society.

Civil society is when the government and society can sit down at the negotiating table, and the government will not have a privileged position in this meeting. This, in my opinion, is an indicator of the development of society.

**Natalya Semenenko, 58 years old,
Director of the Keleshek Psychological
Center, member of the Commission
on Women's Affairs and Family and
Demographic Policy under the Akim of
Astana**

– I have been working as a psychologist for about 30 years. And when you hear about family problems every day, you realize that it is very important to reach a broader social level. To solve these problems, we need to understand what is happening to the society around us, how this or that problematic situation is being formed.

This forced me to go beyond the office to the civilian sector. I am actively involved in the development of NGOs that deal with family, women and children issues. I study world practice. There

are a lot of caring people in this sector, we unite and create various social projects that help make the world around us a better place.

One of the latest projects is to train psychologists to work with families where there is domestic violence. This topic has always been relevant, but for a long time in the legal sphere, these conflicts were considered only as intra-family, people simply preferred not to take the trash out of the house.

And only after a number of high-profile cases, their coverage in social networks by activists, that is, thanks to civil society, the state began to turn to solving this problem.

**Bagdad Sharipova, 49 years old, civil
servant**

Civil society is the foundation of any state. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan says that the people are the only source of State power. In democratic countries, the people have this power directly, where citizens express their will by voting. And we must strive for this.

Every person at his workplace, in his yard, at home should have and defend his civic position, take an active part in the life of the house, the city, in the work team. And then the government will listen to people. There should be many non-governmental organizations that express the will of the people in order to maintain parity and balance between the government and the people.

We seem to have a lot of NGOs, and you often hear about some human rights and environmental organizations and initiatives against domestic violence on social networks. People's consciousness is changing. Moreover, with the advent of social networks, thanks to which information is distributed instantly today, and everyone can express their opinion on any issue.

It all depends on us. If we are active, have our own position, our own voice, we will be able to move the situation. So far, we cannot boast of conditions like in civilized developed countries, but we must strive for this.



The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is a political foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. With its programmes and projects, the Foundation actively and effectively promotes international cooperation and mutual understanding.

The Representative Office of the Foundation in Kazakhstan began its work in 2007 at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Foundation works in partnership with government agencies, the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, civil society organizations, universities, political parties and enterprises.

The main purpose of the Foundation's activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan is to strengthen mutual understanding and partnership between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Kazakhstan through cooperation in the field of political, educational, social, cultural and economic development, thus contributing to the further development and prosperity of Kazakhstan.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation has the following priorities in the Republic of Kazakhstan:

- Policy and Party Counselling
- Interparliamentary Dialogue
- Energy and Climate
- Local Self-Governance
- Political Education
- Media
- Sur-Place Scholarships



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