



#3 (05-06) 2024

# Adal Azamat

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

## THE GROWTH PATH OF THE KAZAKHSTAN'S CIVIL SOCIETY





# 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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## WELCOME SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIL ALLIANCE OF KAZAKHSTAN BANU NURGAZIYEVA



### DEAR FRIENDS, DEAR COLLEAGUES AND PARTNERS!

Kazakhstan's civil society is undergoing dynamic changes, and the role of NGOs in this process cannot be overestimated. The economic and social challenges that the Government faces require close cooperation between the State and the third sector. We are all interested in improving the well-being of Kazakhstanis, strengthening the middle class and reducing social inequality. To achieve these goals, not only economic, but also legal reforms are needed.

Since its foundation, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan has been working to unite civil society and strengthen partnerships with government agencies, as well as seeking to integrate existing NGOs into the decision-making process aimed at improving the lives of citizens.

### REFORMING LEGISLATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF NGOS

This year, the Alliance's experts began work on improving legislation affecting the activities of the non-governmental sector. Despite the fact that at first glance, the country has created the necessary institutional and legal mechanisms for functioning of NGOs, there are certain barriers that limit the effectiveness of public associations. Today, the third sector is facing many challenges related to financing, competence and interaction with government agencies. Systemic changes at the legislative level are needed to solve these problems.

First of all, it is necessary to create a separate law on non-governmental organizations, similar to the laws on trade unions, political parties and religious associations. The basic principles of this document should regulate such key issues as taxation, registration, liquidation of NGOs, and international cooperation. By the way, these important points are not specified in the current law "On non-profit organizations". In the future, the current legislative framework will improve the effectiveness of civil society institutions and strengthen the position of NGOs in dialogue with the state.

Another significant step towards increasing the sustainability of the third sector was creation of a Register of Problems of non-governmental organizations. For several months, working group of the Ministry of Culture and Information, with the participation of experts from the Civil Alliance, has been working to systematize the main problems of NGOs in eight areas: partnerships with the state, financing, legislation, state support, organization and development of NGOs, tax and other reporting, interaction with business and international cooperation. The uniqueness and practical benefit of this document lies not only in formation of list of difficulties, but also in description of specific recommendations for their solution. One example is change in the rules of the state social order. Today, many NGOs are forced to take out loans to fulfill their obligations under social orders, as there is no mechanism for mandatory advance payments. Experts of the Civil Alliance held talks with representatives of the Ministry of Finance on legislative introduction of mandatory advance

payment to non-governmental organizations in the amount of 30%. Such a rule will contribute to improving the financial situation of NGOs and will allow them to implement projects in a timely manner.

Similar work has been carried out in the field of grant financing and organization of public procurement of NGOs. To ensure transparency in allocation of grants, formation of expert groups and selection of winners, the Civil Alliance proposed amendments to the rules of grant financing for NGOs, which have already been discussed with representatives of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs.

With regard to public procurement, simplifying the application and reporting process for NGOs has become a priority here. Unfortunately, there is still no unified approach to creative reports and indicators for evaluating NGO projects. Therefore, we need regulatory changes to facilitate the participation of NGOs in public procurement, and on the other hand, to ensure transparency and fairness of this process.

The changes proposed by the Civil Alliance are aimed at creating a stable legal framework for activities of the non-governmental sector in Kazakhstan. Obviously, without clear legislative norms, the further development of NGOs will be difficult.

### PUBLIC COUNCILS ARE THE MIDDLE LINK BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

The Institute of public councils, which allows citizens to actively participate in implementation of state policy and control over its implementation plays a significant role in strengthening the dialogue between the government and society. In 2024, within the framework of the project "Development of the Institute of Public Councils", the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan implemented a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening the potential of these advisory structures under government agencies and increasing their effectiveness.

Today, there are 262 public councils in Kazakhstan, of which 25 are under central government bodies, 38 city, 168 district, 20 councils operate in regions and cities of republican significance, 11 consultative and advisory structures have been created under the subjects of quasi-state bodies. They provide platform not only for discussion of issues of social protection, ecology, health and education, but also for rising of problems of regional development, implementation of state programs and national projects.

Given the scale of the activity and the depth of the topics studied by experts, there is a need for continuous professional development of members of public councils. In this regard, the Civil Alliance has taken on the task of conducting training seminars for council members at all levels. Trainings and webinars included clarification of legislation in the field of public control, pre-trial settlement of labor disputes, safety of women and children, and were also devoted to studying the international experience of similar advisory structures.

To strengthen cooperation between public councils,

so-called study tours were held under the auspices of the Alliance in Astana, Almaty, Aktobe and Karaganda regions. The participants of the study tour actively exchanged successful cases and shared knowledge and skills. For example, in Aktobe, they monitored the environmental situation at a large enterprise, developed recommendations for improving the ecology of the region. In the Karaganda region, members of public councils focused on improving the quality of medical services and discussed the current health insurance system.

One of the key objectives of the project is to increase the transparency of the activities of public councils. In order to inform the general public about the work carried out by the experts, the website was updated [kazkenes.kz](http://kazkenes.kz). It contains up-to-date information about 3,400 members of public councils, their composition, regulatory documents and analytical materials. Briefings, live broadcasts and television appearances by members of public councils helped to convey to the public the essence of public work and demonstrate the results of the councils' activities.

It is worth noting that this year a KPI assessment methodology was introduced for members of public councils, which was tested at all levels. The system includes seven criteria, such as organizational skills, work in permanent committees, interaction with government agencies and NGOs, transparency and publicity. Such an assessment mechanism is aimed at increasing the motivation and effectiveness of the work of members of public councils.

Despite the successes achieved, there are still many issues that require prompt resolution. Unfortunately, there is still insufficient responsibility of government agencies for implementing the recommendations of public councils. In order to radically change the situation, we consider it advisable to introduce electronic accounting of recommendations of members of advisory bodies and strengthen control over their implementation.

It is also important to review the process of forming public councils, excluding the possibility of participation of persons with kin relations in government agencies, and to introduce electronic voting in the elections of members of public councils.

For its part, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan will continue to improve the work of public councils. Modern society is extremely interested in councils becoming a real tool for influencing decision-making.

The expiring year has become an important stage in the development of civil society in Kazakhstan. However, there are still many tasks ahead that require joint efforts. Creation of strong legal framework, development of dialogue between society and the state, as well as support for citizens' initiatives are the main priorities of the organization.

The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan is always open for cooperation and encourages all stakeholders to join our projects. Together, we will be able to strengthen civil society institutions and contribute to building a more just and prosperous Kazakhstan.

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



## Why is it necessary to regulate the information marketing business?

The market of information and educational services offered on social networks is booming. You can learn anything on the Internet today. Hundreds of thousands of information sellers promote their virtual courses, which are in demand among the population. However, cases of fraud on the part of unscrupulous “Fake gurus” – so-called specialists without the necessary education and experience, actively working in the information marketing business, have recently become more frequent. In this regard, Kazakhstan has started talking about the need for legislative regulation of this area.

Mazhilisman Amantai Zharkynbek was one of the initiators of regulating the information marketing business. In his parliamentary inquiry, he noted the growth of fraudulent actions on the part of unscrupulous business coaches, coaches, psychologists who earn a lot of money by deceiving gullible citizens. The manipulations of such pseudo-specialists lead to serious consequences, including the fragmentation of families and an increase in the number of divorces.

“Despite the fact that sellers of information earn millions through social networks, they do not pay a single penny to the budget. It is time to carefully study this issue and regulate it by law,” – Amantay Zharkynbek said.

He suggested that the government check the legality of the activities of paid courses, webinars, sellers of information products through social networks, as well as develop a regulatory bill.

According to the Mazhilisman, one of the solutions may be mandatory accreditation of online courses and training programs. At the same time, he considers it necessary to strengthen Internet monitoring and promptly respond to violations of the law. In most cases, services or courses promoted online by dubious specialists turn out to be useless. As a result, people spend their time and money on empty promises instead of developing real skills.

“Professional standards for business coaches should be approved. The people should be informed about the methods of protection against Internet scammers and fake gurus who spread false and even harmful information, which negatively affects the credibility of real experts offering really valuable information,” – the deputy notes.

Similar opinion is shared by Zarema Shaukenova, co-chairman of the priority “Creation and functioning of the Institute of psychological service” of the women’s sector of the AMANAT party, academician of the National Academy of Sciences. For several years, she has been calling for adoption of a law regulating the provision of psychological assistance in Kazakhstan, including information marketing business. According to the expert, today this area is not controlled by legislation in any way, and therefore anyone can work with people’s minds today.

“The law should be aimed at ensuring that Kazakhstanis can receive

high-quality assistance from certified specialists without fear of coming at fake gurus, who often have neither education nor experience,” – notes Zarema Shaukenova.

The problem is complicated by the fact that the psychological health of the population requires high competence from specialists. At the same time, the information marketing business offers a huge number of courses and trainings that are positioned as help in solving any psychological problems. However, they are conducted by people who do not even have basic psychological education, the expert notes.



According to Zarema Shaukenova, it is necessary to introduce mandatory licensing. State regulation in the field of psychology should begin with creation of a national database of certified specialists, which will allow Kazakhstanis to check the qualifications and reliability of any psychologist. The introduction of standards in the profession will help distinguish those who have actually studied at universities from those who offer quick results and dispense with academic training.

Another important innovation may be the introduction of profession cards for different areas of psychology.

“Psychological assistance requires a comprehensive approach and training in particular specialties, because psychology, like medicine, includes many specializations, from child and adolescent psychology to sports psychology,” – she notes. The legislative consolidation of these professions will create clear guidelines for educational programs and licensing.

Today, there are more than 30 educational institutions in Kazakhstan that train psychologists, but not all of them go to work in their specialty, and those who remain do not always meet the high requirements of the profession.

Discussing the problem of information marketing business influence, Zarema Shaukenova emphasizes that the activity of pseudo-specialists can seriously reduce the level of trust in the work of professionals. Legislative regulation will help to offset the social damage caused by the activities of unskilled psychologists and maintain respect for the profession.

“People should know that behind the words “psychological help” there is a real qualification and responsibility to the client,” – the expert emphasizes.

Until the law is passed, private psychologists continue to work in conditions of insufficient transparency. The new law will be a comprehensive solution to the problems and will contribute to the creation of a safe market for psychological services in Kazakhstan.

## Kazakhstan is reviewing approaches to the provision of state grants

The rules for formation, provision of monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of state grants will undergo changes. Amendments to the document were announced by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The innovations provide for differentiated approach to grant financing, taking into account the characteristics and needs of various grantees.

In particular, as the initiators of the amendments explained, it is proposed to revise the requirements for provision of medium-term grants. To do this, a two-stage mechanism for selection of grantees will be introduced. At the first stage, it is proposed to involve independent experts who will evaluate the projects and recommendations of the operator (Center for Support of Civil Initiatives). At the second stage, an independent competition commission, including representatives of government customers, the operator and non-governmental organizations, will make the final decision on the selection of grantees. Such an integrated approach will help to avoid possible conflicts of interest and increase the objectivity of project evaluation, providing equal opportunities to all participants, according to the developers of the amendments.

According to the new rules, the concept of “expert commission” will be replaced by “tender commission”. Thanks to the expanded composition of the decision-making commission, the process will become more transparent and fair.

The Ministry of Culture also announced the introduction of differentiated approach to the allocation of grants depending on their type. Unique requirements will be defined for each type of grant, including the amount of funding, project deadlines and criteria for NGO participation in tenders. As a result, special conditions will be established for medium-term grants, which will ensure support for projects of varying duration and scale.

“This approach will simplify the procedures for grant financing,” – the Ministry of Culture and Information stressed.

An important aspect of the new system will be the simplification of reporting for NGOs. Clear and flexible requirements will help organizations focus on implementation of their projects, rather than on complex bureaucracy.

Such an approach has already proved successful in other countries, where multi-level selection systems and flexible conditions have made it possible to identify the most promising projects and give them a way. Thus, the State strives to use best practices to create favorable conditions for development of civil society and support for initiatives.



## How the JOL-TAP social project opens up prospects for thousands of Astana residents

Dana Zhunusova, head of the JOLTAP social project, spoke about the impressive results of the initiative aimed at teaching digital professions and finding employment for Astana residents. In one year of the project's existence, thousands of Astana residents have found jobs or started their own business, applying new skills and knowledge.

According to Dana Zhunusova, the project offers 18 short-term courses, of which 8 are dedicated to teaching digital professions, and 10 are industrial worker specialties. These include classes in sewing, baristics, tire fitting, as well as courses in mobilography, SMM, targeting, video editing and graphic design. Important advantage of the project is that the training is provided completely free of charge.

For the convenience of citizens, there are about 7 modular points in the capital called "Barshaga mumkindik", located in places with high attendance, where anyone can enroll in the course.

"The duration of training varies from 5 to 22 days, depending on the chosen course. Upon completion of the classes, participants receive certificates, supplies and necessary equipment," - Dana Zhunusova explained.

Special attention is paid to the support of graduates in matters of employment. This task is solved using the JUMYSTAP platform, which hosts more than 2,000 current vacancies from 1,600 employers in the capital. Today, the platform is actively used by over 10 thousand people.

During the first year of JOLTAP's operation, more than 24 thousand people applied to modular points, of which more than 20 thousand enrolled in courses. Today, 8 thousand residents of the capital have already been trained in new professions, some of them have started their own business.

But most importantly, the social project has become an important tool for improving the quality of life of young people. With his help, young citizens were able to obtain specialties in demand on the market and opened new career horizons for themselves.

Given the relevance of the topic and high interest of residents of other cities of the country in the project, the successful JOLTAP case will be scaled to four regions: Almaty, Shymkent, Aktope and Karaganda.

## In 2025, measures to support citizens with disabilities will be strengthened

In Kazakhstan, it is planned to reduce the time needed to replace wheelchairs and ensure the free provision of orthopedic shoes to people with special needs. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has prepared a number of amendments to the current orders, which are aimed at improving the living conditions of this population group.

One of the key innovations is aimed at reducing the time needed to replace wheelchairs. Priority will be given to children. Thus, for children under 7 years old, all types of wheelchairs are planned to be changed once every three years. For children over 7 years of age, the replacement time will depend on the type of chair: indoor chairs will be replaced every five years, and universal ones every four years. The replacement period for indoor wheelchairs for adults will also be reduced by a year and will be six years. Now, the standard replacement period for mobile vehicles for both children and adults is seven years for indoor wheelchairs and four years for strollers.

In addition, the new order provides for providing all persons with disabilities with prosthetic and orthopedic shoes, shoes for devices (prostheses) and means of a therapeutic and preventive nature at the expense of the budget. Currently, such services are provided depending on the disability group, and people often have to pay 50% or even 100% of the cost themselves.

In addition, it is planned to eliminate age restrictions when providing laptops with a webcam and specialized software for screen access and speech synthesis, as well as portable typhoid computers with Braille input/output function. Currently, such technical means are provided only to people of working age, but after the adoption of the amendments, they will be available to all other citizens.

To improve the quality of life of people with visual impairments, it is planned to replace standard players with specialized tifloflash players that have advanced technical capabilities. The requirements for provision of sign language specialist services in a remote format have also been revised, which will expand access to such services and ensure equal opportunities for all those in need.

The changes will take effect on January 1, 2025.

## The balance between security and freedom

Representatives of the public sector and civil society discuss the future of charity in Kazakhstan. The developers of amendments to the legislation were two departments at once: The Financial Monitoring Agency and the Ministry of Culture and Information. The proposals to tighten control over the activities of charitable organizations and their mandatory accreditation raised the most questions among public figures.

Svetlana Ushakova, a member of working group, head of the public foundation "Institute of National and International Development Initiatives", said that the initiators of legislative changes are discussing the introduction of control over charitable collections through mandatory accreditation for organizations.

"The amendments are related to the implementation of the eighth FATF recommendation (Financial Action Task Force, International Group on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing). But excessive control can damage the development of charity and deprive citizens of opportunity to help each other," - social activist explains.

In her opinion, the accreditation of charitable organizations should be voluntary, otherwise this measure will create bureaucratic barriers limiting the activities of charitable foundations.

Another point that caused a mixed reaction from the public is proposal to give akimats the function of monitoring charitable collections. For example, local authorities will determine which public associations can raise funds in emergency situations. This means that only accredited organizations that have received the approval of akimats will be able to collect donations. According to Svetlana Ushakova, such an innovation can lead to corruption and violation of the transparency of processes.

Other amendments provide for a ban on collection of funds by individuals for charity purposes. For those who violate the ban, it is proposed to impose a fine of 80 MCI. Public activists fear that the usual practice of collecting donations for treatment, support for victims of natural disasters and other needs will become impossible.

For example, Julia Eskova-Krasutskaya, the founder of the Almaty animal shelter "Nobility Assembly", is already concerned about how her shelter can survive in new conditions.

"We don't have a legal account, and all donations go through my personal accounts. The amendments may lead to the closure of the shelter, because I will have no one to deal with reporting and documentation," - she shared.

In her opinion, the initiative protects against unfair fees, but at the same time threatens to become a tool for corruption.

"On the one hand, it will reduce the risk of fraud. On the other hand, in nontransparent control system, this can become another way to receive bribes," - added the founder of the shelter.

Most experts and public figures agree on one thing: any reform in such a sensitive area should be thought out and worked out with the participation of all stakeholders. Amendments can both protect against fraud and create obstacles to free assistance.

In this regard, NGO representatives organized an informal discussion of the necessary changes among charities and non-profit organizations in order to develop common positions and proposals, which will then be submitted to the working group at the Ministry.

"We want to develop our proposals and comments, because among us there are experts with international experience, lawyers, and I think this will be a good contribution already at the working group under the Ministry of Culture and Information," - said Svetlana Ushakova, head of the public foundation Institute of National and International Development Initiatives.

*As noted by the Minister of Culture and Information Aida Balayeva, the purpose of the changes is to protect Kazakhstanis from fraud. She added that the agency will continue to discuss amendments to the legislation with the participation of experts, representatives of civil society and philanthropists.*

"The issue is being discussed. Working group has been established under the Ministry. There are no concrete solutions yet, as we are collecting proposals and studying the opinions of experts. There are facts of speculation and fraud, so we are considering improving the mechanism of charitable assistance," - the minister concluded.



# How effective partnership between the state and NGOs improves the life of society



*"Our task is to strengthen cooperation, because only together we can effectively solve problems"*

**Mature civil society is foundation of stability and progress in any state. This statement became the leitmotif of the meeting of the leaders of the Civil Alliance, RNGO "Senimen Bolashak" and representatives of the public sector. Today, more and more efforts are being directed at strengthening the relationship between NGOs and the state, since constructive partnership makes it possible to effectively solve socially significant problems, improve the quality of life of citizens and support democratic institutions.**

The dialogue platform brought together leaders of the country's leading NGOs from all regions, as well as heads of departments of internal policy and public development of cities and regions. As noted by the President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, Banu Nurgaziyeva, these are the people who form the ideological agenda, implement social projects and form public opinion. The parties agreed that in order to implement their projects and missions efficiently, it is necessary to build clear rules of interaction.

## PARTNERSHIP IS NOT IN WORDS, BUT IN DEEDS

According to Gulbara Sultanova, Chairman of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the state is extremely interested in partnership with the non-governmental sector.

"We are currently facing many different challenges, especially in the context of globalization and digitalization. The number of civil society leaders is growing – these are not always well-known leaders with status, but they have the strength and support of people behind them. Our task is to strengthen cooperation, because only together we can effectively solve problems. It is impossible for government agencies and public organizations to achieve their goals separately, because we are united by one common mission – improving the

quality of life of citizens," – she addressed the participants of the meeting.

At the same time, Gulbara Sultanova emphasized the role of large public associations in this work. Today, the Civil Alliance and other non-government organizations act not only as executors of social projects, but also as reliable partners who support the initiatives of the state at the central and regional levels.

In recent years, there has been a positive trend towards improving the quality of social initiatives. However, everything is still not smooth, there are certain difficulties. For example, such large-scale social projects as the organization of resource centers and crisis services should operate on a long-term basis. The reality is that the process of holding contests is delayed for several months, leaving little time to complete tasks. In this regard, Gulbara Sultanova spoke in support of NGOs and suggested that the departments of internal policy and social development reconsider approaches to planning social projects.

"If you see that the project has been successfully launched and is being implemented, why not transfer it to a long-term format. Such an approach will ensure the sustainability and stability of NGO activities, and departments do not need to announce new tenders or contests every time," – she said.

During the seminar, the head of the Committee raised the issue of the distribution of grants and the state budget, noting that these are different tools that complement each other. With the help of the state social order, the state clearly formulates its requirements and tasks for NGOs. Grants, on the contrary, imply greater freedom of action for NGOs, which themselves offer approaches to solving problems.

"Government agencies often do not see all options for solving problems. We allocate funds for grants so that NGOs can offer innovative solutions," – G.Sultanova explained.

## GRANT SUPPORT FOR NGOs: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE REGIONS

The issue of grant financing was continued by the Chairman of the Management Board of the NGO "Center for Support of Civil



Initiatives” Lima Dias. She spoke about how actively NGOs participate in competitions, as well as plans to issue grants next year. Today, the list of areas for grant financing is formed on the basis of proposals from civil society leaders. Since 2019, the total number of grants, their customers and NGOs involved in the implementation of projects has been gradually increasing. According to the Center for Support of Civil Initiatives, in the first half of 2024, 116 non-governmental organizations are implementing 201 projects commissioned by 23 government agencies. By the end of the year, their number will increase and quite possibly become a record for the entire time of grant implementation.

If we look at the regional context, the Atyrau, Mangystau and Zhetysay regions show traditional activity.

“Since 2022, Mangystau region has been a leader in grant financing every year. Almost 90% of the grants remain in the region. This year, the region has placed 50 grants in the amount of 589 million tenge. Moreover, 48 NGOs are grantees, 44 of them are local. The percentage of applications is slightly less than in previous years, but it is also very high. There are 145 applications for 57 grants. This is a very high activity,” – said Lima Dias.

This year, for the first time, the cities of republican significance – Almaty and Shymkent – became interested in grant projects. The general trend towards an increase in the number of applications and participants confirms that grants have a positive impact on the development of NGOs.

It is worth noting that the main customer of grants until 2024 was the Ministry of Culture and Information, now other central government agencies have begun to pay attention to supporting NGO grant projects. This year, for the first time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has placed 17 grants through the Center for Support of Civil Initiatives for a total amount of 180 million tenge.

“Since last year, central government agencies and ministries have the opportunity, as well as the MCI, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support industry NGOs through grant funding. Currently, the CSCI is working with several ministries: the Ministry of Justice,

the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Trade, and the Ministry of Education. There are many areas in which NGOs and central government agencies can work closely together and implement joint projects. We hope that next year we will be able to announce work with other ministries and departments,” – said the head of the Center for Support of Civil Initiatives.

In conclusion, Lima Dias called on the leaders of the Civil Alliance to promote the interests of public associations on dialogue platforms with the participation of government agencies and raise the issue of the need for ministries to allocate grants for NGOs.

### CIVIC INITIATIVES

At the meeting with representatives of state institutions, activists and NGO leaders were more focused on practical cases. According to civil society leaders, modern society is changing rapidly, which requires new approaches and social innovations from the non-governmental sector and government agencies. In this regard, the chairman of the Republican Non-government organisation “Senimen Bolashak” Zhansaya Ismagulova outlined the basic principles of work that meet the requirements of today’s time. These are the high initiative and activity of NGOs, the involvement of citizens and stakeholders in public life, an individual approach to solving problems in the regions, the introduction of new practices of social interaction, human-centricity and improving the quality of life of the population, as well as motivation by their own actions.

“First of all, the high initiative of NGOs will contribute to the effective solution of problems that may remain outside the field of view of government agencies. In addition, NGOs often have the flexibility and creativity necessary to solve a variety of social issues,” – the speaker explained.

In confirmation of her words, Zhansaya Ismagulova spoke about the implementation of socially significant projects aimed at developing the regions of the country. The activities of non-government organisation “Senimen Bolashak” mainly focus on strengthening child-parent relations. Thus, in the West Kazakhstan region, public activists launched

a project to expand the formats of volunteering. We managed to attract shops, train stations, and government agencies to the partnership. With their help, students were trained, discussions were held and experiences were shared.

In the Karaganda region, fathers’ forums have begun to be held in order to enhance the role of men and involve them in the upbringing of children and youth. A large-scale project called “Design of Life” was launched last year in the Pavlodar region. It is aimed at supporting children from orphanages, who are helped by NGO leaders to make plans for personal and professional growth.

“This project has changed the life of each of us, from the founder of the organisation to the experts. In fact, we have become moms and dads for these children. They get everything from the state, but they lack the attention and involvement of adults, reputable people who could be a role model for them. Now some of the children have joined the army, we will meet them, there are those who have bought an apartment, we are involved in their lives as well,” – Zhansaya Ismagulova shared.

Importantly, by participating in the lives of adolescents and young people, the non-governmental sector helps to address issues of social stability in the region.

As noted by the founder of “Senimen Bolashak”, vice-president of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan Nurken Asanov, 82 teenagers are covered by the project “Design of Life”. By taking over the patronage of these children, social activists ensure the well-being of the Pavlodar region.

“Our children will not commit crimes, they will not get involved with drugs, because they are aimed at creating the design of their lives. They have support in life. They know what they will do after graduating from school and getting a professional education. Their confidence in the future helps to reduce social tensions in the region,” – Nurken Asanov said.

In the future, the NGO plans to scale its successful projects throughout Kazakhstan, and most importantly, to the regions. The active assistance of the state will be required here.

At the current stage, the non-governmental organisation “Senimen Bolashak” has obtained the support of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan in order to jointly change the lives of as many people in the country as possible.

***“The high initiative of NGOs will contribute to the effective solution of problems that may remain outside the field of view of government agencies”***

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IS FOUNDATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NGOs

Summing up the work of the discussion platform, the participants came to the conclusion: in order for the non-governmental sector to constantly develop and be able to act promptly in changing conditions, it is necessary to improve legislation.

According to Gulnar Kurbanbayeva, Vice-President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, the sustainable development of NGOs on the one hand is associated with increasing the competencies of experts in the sector, public awareness and improving the financing of public organizations. On the other hand, it is important to make timely changes at the legislative level, since without this the existing problems cannot be solved.

Currently, proposals have been developed for a separate law on NGOs, which includes tax and legal aspects, mechanisms for interaction with the state and international partners. Register of NGO issues has been created. Proposals have been made for the mandatory payment of an advance of 30% to fulfill state social orders and to revise the rules for granting grants, which will help improve the financial situation of NGOs and increase their efficiency.

“We are being heard now, it is valuable that the state sees civil society leaders as strategic partners. The Civil Alliance continues to work on changes, the active position and participation of all stakeholders is important to achieve sustainable development of the sector,” – Gulnar Kurbanbayeva concluded.



**Bibigul Zheksenbay:**

# New laws should be initiated not only by deputies, but also by civil society itself



*In recent years, civil society has been actively involved in the legislative process. Any citizen of Kazakhstan can make suggestions using different tools. Including through the Institute of petitions, through participation in rallies and public hearings. Nevertheless, the role of the expert community, which represents the civil sector and knows the problems from the inside, is invaluable in the development of draft laws. Deputy of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan Bibigul Zheksenbai told our correspondent about how this interaction takes place, why public control is needed and what role modern media play in the development of a healthy civic space.*

The first stage of the civil society development concept adopted in 2020, is currently being implemented. Its task is precisely to involve active Kazakhstanis in the development of public policy, in the process of making managerial decisions. Several laws have already been passed during this time. One of them is the Law on Public Control. This is a new legal document that emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in public administration and ensuring transparency of government. It offers mechanisms that allow the public to actively participate in monitoring the activities of government agencies and gives representatives of civil society the opportunity to make proposals and protect the interests of ordinary people.

In 2020, amendments to the law on the organization of peaceful assemblies were adopted. According to this law, you do not need to get permission from local authorities to hold rallies, but only to notify. This has expanded the possibilities of the society to publicly express its opinions and demands, to conduct campaigning. Now activists in all regions are using this right, raising topical issues.

Online petitions have also become very popular, where citizens themselves initiate proposals. The

– The interaction of civil society and Parliament plays a crucial role in the development of democracy. In many countries, non-governmental organizations, public activists, and experts are actively involved in the legislative process. How, in the opinion of a person on both sides of the barricades, as a senator and as deputy chairman of the Civil Alliance, are the things going in Kazakhstan?

– The active participation of civil society in the legislative process is important. A lot has been done in Kazakhstan for this purpose. Firstly, the transparency of the Parliament's work has increased. As you know, almost all meetings are live and anyone can not only watch online, but also ask questions.

local authorities began to listen to the society, to its aspirations. Constructive proposals are already being discussed at a high level. This has become the norm.

I remember when amendments to the law on rallies were being developed, I worked at the Ministry of Information. Since I am a journalist by profession, I had to defend the interests of my colleagues. I was outraged that they wanted to protect journalists from the protesters, giving them the opportunity to work only behind the fence. Then how could they perform professional duties, go live, shoot on camera? It was necessary to take into account these nuances. As a result, our comments and suggestions were listened to. Journalists were required to wear special clothing with the designation PRESS during peaceful assemblies. We have adopted clear and more convenient rules for their activities.

All this leads to the fact that representatives of the mass media actively participated in the legislative process concerning the media. In this area, we have many public associations that actively participate in working meetings. These are Adil Soz, the Club of Editors-in-Chief, the Kazakh Press Club, well-known journalists....

I would like to see the same activity in other areas. Yes, there are individual experts and industry unions, but this is not enough. It is clear that the creation of a civil society is still at the stage of development and therefore, probably, there are lot of emotions. So far, it has not always been possible to achieve a constructive dialogue with government representatives at the Parliamentary level.

Nevertheless, the work is underway. I myself had to conduct working commissions on various topics, including mass media. I invited representatives of public associations from different regions. I visited animal shelters in Astana with other deputies when the draft law "on responsible treatment of animals" was submitted to the Parliament and proposals were made. We held a lot of working meetings on copyright and the creative industry. Now this draft law is also under consideration. Thanks to the development of the Internet, civic engagement has increased. This trend has been observed in the last 3-4 years.

Currently, Kazakhstan occupies one of the leading positions in the issue of interaction between civil society and Parliament. Moreover, the Parliament itself is interested in this process. Meetings with voters help in this. For example, during the parliamentary holidays, I met with the city Chamber of Entrepreneurs, where the tax issue was discussed. After that, they drew the attention of the public and the authorities to the fact that the Tax Code needs to be finalized, that all proposals, especially SMEs, were not taken into account. In September, in a Message, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev expressed support and extended the discussion of the Tax Code for a year, giving the opportunity to improve the document taking into account the interests of all parties. The participation of the entire civil society and industry associations is important here. After all, this will directly affect the quality of the bill. Laws are not made for the sake of being. First of all, they must be effective. Therefore, the opinion of the society is extremely necessary.

– Despite the fact that the number of NGOs in Kazakhstan has increased 6.5 times in 15 years and exceeded 23 thousand, legislation in this area is still imperfect. This year, work has begun on making changes and additions to the Concept of Civil Society Development. In addition, it is planned to develop a separate draft law on NGOs. What mandatory standards would you like to see in it?

– The concept of civil society development requires changes. Today, as we can see, it is not enough to limit ourselves only to the standards of NGO activities. In my opinion, the new draft law should include transparent mechanisms for financing NGO activities, standards and mechanisms of public control, and legal protection of NGO employees. Ensuring transparency and accountability of the non-governmental sector should also be a priority.

The issue of the need for a separate law was raised at the Civil Alliance Forum last year in Astana. Of course, some points are already specified in the law on public associations. But all the same, 23 thou-

*"Moreover, new laws should be initiated not only by 148 deputies, but by civil society itself. The more people involved in this process, the more quantitatively and qualitatively the laws will grow"*



sand NGOs are already an army, which represents the most active part of the country's population and carries a heavy burden on the development of society.

Apparently, the time has really come to develop a separate bill. Of course, it is also necessary to specify in detail all the issues of financing and accountability. This is especially important if funding for non-governmental organizations comes from abroad. Recently, they have been paying close attention to this. Since it concerns the national security of the state. It's no secret that if some kind of order is coming from outside and the society receives false information, this can have many negative consequences. A part of the population, and there are many trusting people in Kazakhstan, can be controlled through the Internet and new technologies. Therefore, there should be transparency in everything related to NGO financing.

By the way, funding for non-governmental sector is increasing every year. Moreover, grants are allocated both from international foundations, charities, and from the state. I would like to note that the activities of NGOs are not only related to politics and economics. They also carry a great social burden. They help the state solve the problems of low-income citizens, orphans, the elderly, and people with disabilities who need help and protection. Their role here is simply irreplaceable.

But, unfortunately, not all NGOs are well funded. Sometimes, if funds are allocated by local authorities, financing is carried out on a residual basis. Sometimes such organizations exist for show. This also occurs. For example, they opened for a grant, won, spent money without much result and closed. That is why there is distrust in society.

There must be systematic work, there must be a result, there must be a story that attracts people and local authorities. It is customary abroad. For example, in Norway, where I managed to live for a short time, the state does not actually regulate the activities of the media. The coordinator is public associations that carry authority in society and centuries-old success stories. They are the ones who mediate between the government and the media. Of course, it's too early for us to talk about this, but I think it's worth looking at this experience.

– Over the years, you have been a member of the public councils of a number of central government agencies. How important and effective is the activity of this institution of public control?

**By the way, how do you assess the fact that our Parliament has begun to openly conduct the legislative process?**

– I am glad that the Parliament of our country holds its meetings openly. We have nothing to hide. At all meetings, topical issues are discussed, on the solution of which the development of the country depends. Moreover, these broadcasts also have a legal educational function. They can be observed and listened to by all interested representatives of society. They can express their opinions, leave comments and suggestions. Feedback is important to us. If there are experts, they can participate in the working sessions. I think this tool helps in the adoption of high-quality laws.

Now it is often criticized that we supposedly adopt a lot of laws. But it's actually a good thing. This is a normal process for developed countries, where everything up to the use of a light bulb is regulated by law. For example, I called a plumber, paid, but he didn't do the job the way I needed him to. If he worked in the legal field and my rights were protected by the law, this situation would not exist. The plumber would simply be afraid to lose his license and did his job perfectly. Unfortunately, we don't have that. There is still a lot to be done in the field of consumer rights, in the judicial system, in education, etc.

Moreover, new laws should be initiated not only by 148 deputies, but by civil society itself. The more people involved in this process, the more quantitatively and qualitatively the laws will grow. It is encouraging that the Civil Alliance has taken the initiative to develop a draft law on NGOs and is now working in conjunction with the Ministry, deputies and the Institute of Parliamentarism.

As for public control, in my opinion, it is an important tool for development of civil society and establishing relations with the authorities. But, it seems to me, it is necessary to revise the law on public councils, which still cause distrust from the population.

Public councils are needed. This is undeniable, but not everywhere. For example, they are mandatory in central authorities, ministries, national companies, and large funds. But with local akimats, they are most likely superfluous. After all, in addition to the public council, there are maslikhats here, which often duplicate each other. I think it may be possible to strengthen the role of maslikhats under akimats. In the central authorities, on the contrary, to increase public control.

At the same time, public councils should also be accountable to the public, be more open, and be more weighty. Unfortunately, they are not heard much. It is precisely because of the information vacuum that people are skeptical about their activities. Perhaps also because they do not have special levers and powers to influence the adoption of certain decisions. But if their role is strengthened so that ministries, national companies, and foundations report to the councils as well as to the Parliament and the President, and in turn the councils then report to the population, it is in this case that they can gain trust and authority.

**– Can you, as the head of the public association “Club of Chief Editors”, call journalism the fourth power in our country? What role do modern media play in the development of a healthy civil space?**

– Of course, we understand that the term “quarter power” is only a lyrical definition, which indicates the great influence of the media on society, including the government. If we talk about Kazakhstan, the influence of the media on society undoubtedly exists. They listen not only to journalists, but also to bloggers. Our President carefully monitors the information field and always responds. The society sees how some decisions are canceled at different levels of government, or vice versa, they are made thanks to publications and resonance in society.

Recent examples include the entry of “Saltanat Law” into force, which toughens penalties for violence against women and children.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pays priority attention to ensuring the protection of women's rights and the safety of children. As part of the instructions of the President, relevant Laws have been developed. In particular, additional legal mechanisms have been introduced to ensure the legitimate interests of women and children and strengthen the institution of the family in the country. Responsibility for domestic violence has been strengthened.

Of course, the law is long-suffering, it had many opponents. But the tragic case, which caused a public outcry, and then an open trial and widespread media coverage – all this contributed to its adoption.

Now journalists are actively covering the tragic situation in Talgar, to which society has also reacted violently. The situation was taken under personal control by the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor General's Office.

But it happens that journalists, chasing efficiency, ratings, wanting to give out a sensation, forget about the responsibility they bear to society. Without clarifying the cause and effect, they make hasty conclusions. Some bloggers, in pursuit of likes, start hyping where it is not appropriate. Unfortunately, emotions have now begun to prevail over common sense. Unfortunately, many people have neither the time nor the desire to dig deeper and analyze.

Sometimes, in pursuit of sensational facts, journalists distract people from their work, put them in an awkward position. Having more than 30 years of experience in journalism, I can say that now there is a lack of ethics and responsibility in the journalistic environment. Yes, the mission of a journalist is to inform, objectively cover events, and analyze. But this does not mean to excite people by causing a lot of negative emotions. Journalists should work for the good, make society better, create, educate and develop. Media, and bloggers are also equated with them, it is within their power.

In developed countries, the media and sectoral public associations in the field of media have great authority in society. That is why they are highly trusted by the population. It would be advisable to adopt this experience in Kazakhstan. We are still a young country, going through a stage of growth. We take our hard knocks by working through trial and error. Therefore, public associations are more often active when there is a request, when there are elections or political discussions in the country.... It seems to me, once again, that many people lack consistency. I think that industry associations need

*“Currently, Kazakhstan occupies one of the leading positions in the issue of interaction between civil society and Parliament”*

to work closely with the media and the government. If the state supports the media not directly, but through public associations, then the public's trust in both the government and the media would be greater.

**– How do you assess the work of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan as the largest public organization? Which areas of the non-governmental sector are most actively developing?**

– The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan has a certain history. Its experience is being seriously considered in the CIS countries. This is the huge role of the head of the Alliance Nurgaziyeva Banu Ganiyevna. She has tremendous experience in public service, while working closely with public figures for a long time. The Alliance is turning into a really working organization today, not only in the cities with over 1 million inhabitants, such as Almaty, Astana, Shymkent. Its representative offices work all over the country and know the situation even in deep countryside. I was convinced of this when I took part in the Civil Alliance forum, which brought together more than 600 activists from different regions. All members of the alliance made specific proposals and raised urgent problems. Moreover, regional forums were held in all areas, where hundreds of recommendations were prepared for government agencies.

Therefore, I think it is the Civil Alliance that plays a decisive role in the formation of civil society. Referendum on the construction of a nuclear power plant has recently been successfully held. The issue is important for Kazakhstan, but it has caused a mixed reaction. It was necessary to do a lot of work to explain to the public what a nuclear power plant is for, whether it is safe or not. The Civil Alliance provided great help in this by providing its platform to specialists. The population had the opportunity through the alliance to get the necessary information from all sides, to speak out themselves, to listen to opponents. They had a choice – which side to take when voting. This platform has worked.

The Civil Alliance is not only active when political issues are raised. He also contributes to the development of a “green” economy and environmental awareness. Promotes respect for water resources, promotes water-saving technologies.

Especially its help is invaluable in the social sphere. After all, many NGOs belonging to the

alliance provide assistance to low-income, large families, the disabled, children with severe and genetic diseases, in particular with Down syndrome, autism. They support those who have found themselves in a difficult life situation: they have experienced domestic violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, and imprisonment.

In addition, they develop social entrepreneurship, mediation, and inclusive education. They participate in the legislative process and give expert opinions. Every year the alliance's participation in the life of the country is growing, which is undoubtedly encouraging.

**– What problems do NGOs face most often? Is the financial component the main one? Which financing mechanism do you consider optimal?**

– The issue of financing has always been acute in non-governmental organizations. This happens in all countries. Kazakhstan is no exception. To date, the mechanism for procurement of social services has been worked out quite well. But there is no mechanism that would allow for organizational support, would facilitate the creation of non-governmental organizations in those industries where public initiative is not so developed now. Mechanisms are needed for allocation of institutional grants for the development of NGOs. It's no secret that the lion's share of funds goes to cover the costs of renting premises, paying off administrative expenses. In other words, funding does not come for a specific service to an NGO and does not give it the opportunity to develop systematically and achieve its statutory goals.

Another pressing issue is allocation of funds for the training of NGO employees themselves for self-development and better work. Unfortunately, for many public associations this is a luxury, they cannot afford it due to low funding.

Most importantly, financial resources, especially from government agencies, are often allocated at the wrong time. It happens that NGOs, after winning a tender, have to wait for months for funds and live on “starvation rations”, looking for other sources of income or dismissing employees for a while. As a result, some people lose their motivation. If public associations have been in existence for more than one year, they need to plan their work for at least 5 years ahead. That's when there will be a concrete result. With a spontaneous approach, it is difficult to achieve good performance.

The quality of work is also affected by inflation, which “eats up” part of the funds allocated by the grantee. Declared volume may not be fulfilled. Therefore, all these issues need to be legislatively worked out in detail. It is necessary to make a proposal so that the financing is at least for 3-5 years. So that NGOs can plan and work for results, and not just for reporting. Currently, work is underway to improve the legislation on local self-government. There are not enough NGOs in the country that would deal with issues in the field of local government. For example, various kinds of associations that help the authorities solve housing and communal services problems, for example, roof repairs, garbage removal, etc.

**– Please share with our readers how to successfully combine deputy activity, social activities, creativity with family life and motherhood? Is it difficult for a woman to compete in modern conditions and what is needed for this?**

– In fact, combining family, social and professional activities is important for every woman. Today there are many active and independent women in Kazakhstan who successfully solve big tasks and at the same time remain excellent housewives of the family hearth, raise children.

In my case, the social burden is not a burden, but a help. It really helps in parliamentary activities. Since I see in real life how certain laws work, what needs to be changed or supplemented. Of course, this is energy-consuming, takes a lot of time and effort, and you need to delve more into new topics. My colleagues in the Editors-in-Chief Club help, especially in holding events and working meetings.

As for the family, my children are still young, they study at school. Of course, they require attention. Delving into their interests and studies, again, you better understand how the educational process is organized today, what needs to be changed, what challenges parents face, what children need

to be protected from.... For example, last year, deputies considered a project to ban the use of smartphones by schoolchildren during classes. The law was passed, which was very encouraging. Because I also worry about my children. She also made a parliamentary inquiry on harmful products and energy drinks. As a result, schools in Astana stopped selling them. Or are they actively discussing the limitation of Tik-Tok, the problem of school bullying, etc. Since I face these issues myself in my daily life, it is easier for me to understand which decisions need to be made and which laws will not work.

My colleagues in Parliament also have families and children, and at the same time they try to keep up everywhere, perform at different venues and receive feedback. They maintain their pages on social networks, solve the problems of voters. Since you have assumed parliamentary powers, you must have an active life position. It is a must.

Technology is developing rapidly now, it is easier to extract information, and communication has become better. It has become easier in everyday life: washing machines, slow cookers, robot vacuum cleaners solve many household problems. At the same time, multitasking and the daily large flow of information takes up the lion's share of energy. My family and children help me recover. You give to them and you get in return. It also inspires me when I see the concrete results of my work. This means that all efforts are not in vain, not in the basket, but on the contrary, for the benefit of society.

I think that in the modern world, every woman needs to find herself, her favorite business and work with pleasure. This stimulates development. Then the competition will not be terrible.

**– Thank you for the interview!**

*The conversation was conducted  
by Saida Zharkinova*

*“Journalists should work for the good, make society better, create, educate and develop”*



Artur Lastayev:

# "Beating is not a sign of love"

COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN KAZAKHSTAN ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN KAZAKHSTAN



*What changes have taken place in the legal consciousness of Kazakhstani, which made it possible to adopt progressive laws on the protection of women and children? Why is legal literacy of the population is the key to building a strong state? The Commissioner for Human Rights in Kazakhstan, Artur Lastayev, told Adal Azamat magazine about the challenges in the field of human rights, the role of civil society and the need for systemic changes to strengthen the institution of the family.*

- Artur Yermekovich, the most discussed legal initiative of 2024 is the introduction of amendments and additions to legislative acts on ensuring women's rights and child safety. Neither the traditionalists nor the radicals were able to stop these amendments, although they already succeeded in 2021. What has changed in the legal consciousness of citizens in recent years?

- The adoption of the law on protection of the rights of women and children is an important achievement for the whole society and demonstration of the progressive views of Kazakhstan. The very adoption of these amendments actually demonstrates the unity of government agencies and civil society, the effective work of the Concept of hearing state.

During the review of the law and after its signing, which we also observed, some destructive forces tried to intervene and cause a resonance among the population, deliberately distorting facts, dis-

torting certain provisions, especially concerning children, spreading outright fakes in the media.

We fought against this and carried out explanatory work, but the key role was still played by the fact that in recent years there has been a noticeable increase in awareness of the importance of their rights in society. There has been a shift in the public consciousness in a positive sense, and now issues of justice, equality and protection of vulnerable groups have become a priority.

It became clear, for example, that if a person beats, it does not mean he loves, which means that he commits an offense that should be punishable by law, and that the injured party can count on the support of society and not be afraid of condemnation, that the state can provide the necessary protection.

Stable public position has been formed, which requires ensuring security regardless of social, cultural or traditional attitudes. People have become

more sensitive to rights and freedoms, specifically, they have become more aware in this sense.

Certain high-profile events have contributed to this, of course, but at the same time a lot of work is being done to improve the legal literacy of the population, which is also important.

- To what extent does the current legislation in the field of family law effectively protect victims of domestic violence? Does Kazakhstan's laws in this area comply with international standards? Opinions are often expressed in the Internet space that the legislative norms in the field of protecting the rights of women and children in our country are among the most progressive in the CIS... What do you say to that?

- The current legislation of Kazakhstan in the field of family law, of course, represents a significant progressive step in protecting the rights of women and children against domestic violence. As you know, the adoption of law on combating domestic violence has found a great response not only within the country, but has also been positively assessed by the international community.

The new law introduces norms aimed at preventing violence and protecting victims. In addition, they tighten responsibility for any manifestation of violence against women and children: intentional infliction of minor harm to health and beatings are criminalized, and more severely will be punished for intentional infliction of moderate and serious harm to health.

Nevertheless, in terms of efficiency, we can say that challenges remain. Legislative norms need to be carefully implemented so that the rights of victims of domestic violence are protected consistently and without exceptions. As in a number of other countries, the law in this area faces the need for systematic implementation and coordination of actions between law enforcement agencies, social services and organizations providing support to victims.

As for compliance with international standards, Kazakhstan has indeed adapted most of the internationally recognized norms. However, there is always a need for improvement: prevention and rehabilitation measures, as well as legal assistance to victims, need to be strengthened. This is the next step.

- You annually submit a report to the President on the restoration and protection of citizens' rights. What complaints do our citizens most often address to the Commissioner for Human Rights? What is the evidence of the increase in applications from Kazakhstan to the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights?

- In fact, the nature of the appeals coming to us is very different. We receive the most complaints about the actions and inaction of the investigative bodies, disagreement with judicial acts, and violations of the rights of convicts. The appeals also relate to issues of labor rights protection and health protection.

According to the results of 9 months of 2024, we received 4,859 complaints, which is 10.8% higher than in the same period of 2023. The growth of appeals indicates rather recognition of our institution than increase in violation of rights of citizens in our country.

In addition, the Commissioner has representatives in each region of the country who promptly work out appeals on the ground, conduct visits to correctional or social institutions. All this makes it possible to respond more quickly to complaints and violations of citizens' rights, identify problem areas and take measures to eliminate them.

- What measures, in your opinion, contribute to the prevention of domestic violence? Judging by media reports, the scale of this problem is astounding. How do you assess the effectiveness of existing programs and measures?

Effective prevention of domestic violence requires a comprehensive approach that includes both legal measures and social, educational, and information initiatives. The most important task, in my opinion, is timely assistance to victims and bringing aggressors to justice.

Significant measures include access to emergency hotlines and crisis centers, where victims can receive prompt assistance and protection. Protective regulations that allow the victim to feel safe, as well as increased responsibility for violent offenses, are also effective to some extent.

Work with the population is also of key importance: it is important to develop a line of legal education that forms zero tolerance for violence

among citizens. I believe that educational initiatives aimed at raising legal awareness and respect for human rights help break the vicious circle when violence is perceived as a personal matter of the family.

Rehabilitation and correctional education programs for aggressors are also important – without eliminating the root causes, violence will continue.

As for the existing programs, their basis meets the tasks set, but it is necessary to strengthen practical implementation. Now the attention to this problem is growing, and we are seeing a gradual expansion of support opportunities. However, for maximum effectiveness, it is necessary to progressively strengthen interdepartmental cooperation, coordination between law enforcement agencies, social services and civil organizations, as well as develop a systematic approach at all levels of society.

**- There is an opinion that many really high-quality and logical laws have been adopted in our country, but the issue always rests on poor enforcement. How to overcome this legal apathy at the level of the state machinery and society itself?**

- Indeed, sometimes we come across the fact that laws are not always strictly observed in practice. But the reason for this lies not in poor enforcement, but rather in the lack of a systematic approach and control. Sometimes a lack of legal culture and interest plays a role here, not only among performers, but also among society as a whole.

Perhaps we need greater transparency and accountability of government agencies. When each stage of law enforcement is open to public scrutiny and evaluation, it is more difficult for violators to avoid responsibility, and public confidence in the legal system increases. Effective monitoring and feedback mechanisms, as well as independent evaluation of results, are important steps in this direction.

Secondly, again, the formation of a legal culture and responsibility in society plays a significant role. Every citizen should be aware of their rights and understand that their participation in the legal process – whether it is appealing against illegal actions or seeking support – is a contribution to the public good. Increasing legal literacy and people's involvement in public processes creates an incentive for

more responsible enforcement of laws at all levels.

Finally, it is important to strengthen the professional development and motivation of personnel in the state machinery. This requires a decent salary, a system of continuous training, development of competencies and improvement of employee skills. So that they understand the importance of their contribution to the rule of law and feel responsible to society.

**- What measures do you consider necessary to improve the legal literacy of the population?**

- I will tell you what we are trying to do in this direction. Legal education of the population is one of the priorities of the Institution of the Commissioner and, following this task, we hold various events – meetings with the population, consultations, personal receptions.

This year, a large-scale comprehensive “Legal Hour” was initiated – together with regional representatives, we held a number of lectures for different categories of citizens, including school-children and students, employees of the enterprise, representatives of civil society.

In total, about 20,000 people from different regions took part in this event. As part of the general education, various issues related to the protection of human and civil rights were raised.

Also, some work is carried out by the office and in the information field, including on social networks. We try to use all available platforms to reach as many people as possible with educational work. If tomorrow, when you go out on the street, you ask a passerby “What are human rights?”, and he can give a more or less accurate answer, then this can be considered a certain achievement.

**- Is there any progress in providing an accessible environment for disabled people? Can we say that the rights of disabled citizens are fully protected in our country? What examples can be given to confirm what has been said?**

Despite all the efforts made by the State and human rights organizations today, a number of issues regarding the observance of the rights of disabled people still remain open. Although we, as a state, are on the right track.

Unfortunately, people with special health needs face social exclusion, discrimination, limited access to infrastructure, unequal opportunities in the labor market, and others. But these problems are not unique to Kazakhstan, disabled people face them everywhere.

However, the State consistently takes systemic measures to address these issues. For example, our country is implementing a National Plan to ensure the rights and improve the quality of life of disabled people. In 2023, the country ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was an important step in strengthening the human rights framework.

Within the framework of the Social Code, a multi-level system of social protection for persons with disabilities has been introduced, which covers State assistance, including benefits and social payments, social rehabilitation with compensation for lost functions, specialized social services, as well as employment measures.

Separate line is the issue of protecting the rights of people with disabilities serving a sentence in correctional institutions. When visiting prison establishments, we always pay attention to whether basic conditions are provided for them.

Today, about 760 people with disabilities are maintained in institutions of the penal correction system. Of course, they require special conditions and correctional institutions must take this into account. International human rights organizations pay close attention to this issue and we need to comply with generally accepted standards.

By the way, we have initiated a proposal to the Government to create modern multidisciplinary mixed-security prison in the country, which could maintain different categories of convicts, including women, women with young children, minors, and, of course, the disabled. This would help solve a number of problems that both employees of the penal enforcement system and prisoners face today. Most importantly, such modern prisons will take into account the needs of people with disabilities.

As a part of the civilized world, Kazakhstan simply cannot stay away from international standards and we will definitely come to the conclusion that people with special needs will feel more confident, their opportunities will be expanded.

***Increasing legal literacy and people's involvement in public processes creates an incentive for more responsible enforcement of laws at all levels***

**- The institution of the Commissioner for Human Rights acts as a bridge between the state and society. What do you think the well-being of citizens depends on? What is the role of civil society in building the rule of law?**

- In my opinion, the well-being of citizens depends on many factors: the level of economic development, the stability of state institutions, the level of trust in them, availability of social services, the fairness of the judicial system, as well as possibilities of each person for self-realization and protection of their rights.

Along with these factors, the development of civil society is crucial. The more active and conscious a society is, the higher the well-being of people.

Civil society, of course, plays an important role in building the rule of law, ensuring a balance between government and society. It is an active and conscious civil society that is able to monitor the actions of the state, demand respect for rights and freedoms, as well as raise and solve important social problems.

The effectiveness of the rule of law largely depends on how actively citizens are willing to defend their rights, interact with state institutions and participate in public processes.



**Diana Okremova:**

# The State needs to see NGOs as partners, not a threat

*“Legal Media Center” Public Foundation is well known today not only throughout Kazakhstan, but also beyond its borders. The Foundation’s staff actively participated in working groups established under the Parliament and ministries to develop such bills as on mass media, access to information, and personal data protection. They are always at the forefront in protecting the rights of journalists and are a kind of buffer between representatives of civil society and the state. We are talking with Diana Okremova, Director of the Legal Media Center.*



*Diana Okremova is a journalist, media expert, member of the Expert Council on Human Rights under the Commissioner for Human Rights in Kazakhstan, Deputy Chairman of the Public Committee on Media Self-Regulation.*

**– Diana Yurievna, please can you tell us about how you came to the civil sector?**

– After graduating from Kostanay State University, I worked as a journalist in a local newspaper when the International Foundation for the Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil soz” invited me to become its regional representative and monitor violations of freedom of speech in the region. About a year later, I came up with the idea to create my own organization, the main function of which was legal support, protection and education of journalists.

In 2010, we moved to Astana, where we had real possibilities in making efforts aimed at improving the media sphere. Today, when the Legal Media Center is on the threshold of its 20th anniversary, I can say with confidence that we have reached a higher level. As a rule, many human rights organizations focus only on advisory support. We are involved in development of laws, that is, we are not only fighting the consequences, but also trying to change the legislation itself so that it is more progressive and in line with international standards.

**– Which of the already implemented projects would you like to highlight?**

– One of our permanent functions is monitoring the state information order, which we have been conducting for many years, and trying to prove to officials that this money is being spent inefficiently. Kazakhstan has al-

ready allocated 67 billion tenge per year for this! But they do not give the desired result, and this system, which does not develop the media market, but, on the contrary, contributes to its stagnation, needs to be changed.

Undoubtedly, it is worth noting our cooperation with the journalism faculties of Kazakhstani universities. A few years ago, while traveling around the regions and communicating with teachers and students, we realized that journalism faculties do not have a modified module for teaching disciplines. For example, media law is not taught by lawyers, and it is not always done professionally.

We have developed a standard module that includes all sections of media law and offered it to universities. And they even went further, developing modules such as “Investigative Journalism”, “Journalistic Ethics”, “Economic Journalism”, “Political Journalism”, that is, such, relatively speaking, “semi-finished products” that can be taken and adapted for teaching at any university, making their own authorial adjustments.

I also consider our work with judges, deputies of maslikhats, elected akims to be significant, aimed at improving their competencies and improving communications with journalists and civil society. Improving the quality of public administration, involving citizens in decision-making, achieving transparency – these goals are important not only for civil society, but also for the state as a whole.

**– One of the merits of the Legal Media Center can be called participation in the development and adoption of the sensational Law “On Mass Media”, which lasted about two years.**

– As well as laws on access to information and on informatization – this has become a really important experience for us. Thus, thanks to our work, among other things, the Law “On Mass Media” introduced a one-year statute of limitations in cases of protection of honor and dignity, and the deadline for providing answers to journalistic inquiries was reduced from seven to five days. These are the things that we have constantly point-

ed out to government agencies, making it clear what is important for the media space today, and why repressive laws should not be passed.

But, unfortunately, mostly its norms duplicate the old law on the media, and this was our main point of disagreement with the drafters. We proposed to prescribe guarantees for the safety of journalists and introduce administrative liability for obstructing their professional activities. Because journalists often face in practice the fact that they are not allowed to enter somewhere, denied access to information, and they do not have any legislative levers to fight this. In Europe, a model law on freedom of speech has also recently been adopted, and the difference with ours is fundamental. All these guarantees for journalists have been introduced there, and our law is rather aimed at state regulation of the media.

**– What other difficulties do you face in your work?**

– Certain difficulties arise when we try to participate in the development of laws, of course. But I want to say that even a few years ago it was much worse: we were not perceived as partners, being considered annoying flies who want to spoil something or make trouble. In recent years, we have seen that civil society is still being listened to, we are more often perceived as experts, our recommendations are taken into account, analysis is based on them, etc.

So there are fewer difficulties now. But so far, it seems to me, representatives of Kazakhstani NGOs are not active and united enough, there is no cooperation, many lack experience, expertise and competencies in how to properly participate in the legislative process.

**– For two decades in this field, you can certainly analyze how civil society is changing in Kazakhstan. The need for its development is often discussed from high stands. But what obstacles do you see for this?**

– If we talk about the perception of civil society as a whole, it can be noted that it



” We are not enemies or spies. We are all working on the same tasks – progressive legislation, international standards, normal law enforcement practice, involvement of citizens in the affairs of society and the state.”

has become more active. An example of this is the recently adopted so-called “Saltanat Law”. It seems to me that this tragic event was a turning point for our civil society, when people realized that they could change something.

But, unfortunately, there are still government NGOs, one-day NGOs created to receive a state order, and this is sad. We have quite a few NGOs that are engaged in protecting the rights of women, children, and disabled people. These are certainly very important areas. But there are also more sensitive topics that can be dangerous to deal with – freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful assembly, elections, everything related to political rights. There are few NGOs in this sector that are really active and want to change something.

As soon as a non-profit organization becomes really important to the population, and the government see that it attracts attention and solves issues, then for some reason persecution begins against it. As in the case of well-known public foundation, which helped a huge number of women in our country. It seems to me that we still have a lot of government pressure and influence on such NGOs, so there are not many of them. The State wants to control the civil

sector, the legislation in relation to the latter is unfriendly, there are a lot of fines, it's like walking through a minefield, you never know which side you might be prosecuted from.

I think it's time for the state to reconsider its views and start seeing NGOs as partners, not a threat. We are not enemies or spies. We are all working on the same tasks – progressive legislation, international standards, normal law enforcement practice, involvement of citizens in the affairs of society and the state.

**– You have extensive experience working with foreign institutions and non-governmental organizations. Can you draw parallels? What should we learn from them?**

– Indeed, we have long had partners in almost every country of the post-Soviet space and the European Union. Not so long ago, I spent five months on an internship in the USA. And, of course, I see the difference.

In Europe and the USA, citizens have more rights, opportunities and the desire to be active. For example, in the USA, I watched rallies and peaceful gatherings every day. If Americans disagree with something, they write letters to congressmen, come up with various activities to defend and protect their



” If we talk about the perception of civil society as a whole, it can be noted that it has become more active”

rights. They have a strong culture of charity and donations, large NGOs raise money for their activities through donations. People there really feel their benefits and understand that if there is no strong civil society, then stagnation will occur, no one will control the actions of the government. Of course, we only have to dream about this.

Our NGOs also lack cohesion and joint efforts. Abroad, if we are talking about the same idea, even if organizations work in different fields and do not support each other, they instantly unite and thus strengthen their potential. This is very important! In our country, NGOs rarely unite to protect or support someone. As a rule, our non-profit organizations work on their own to implement their own projects. And it seems to me that we are not using this power of unity in vain.

It is also worth noting such a sensational sore point as the recently adopted law on foreign agents in Russia and other countries. In Kazakhstan, this is called a “List of organizations and individuals receiving foreign funding.” All this rhetoric is aimed at creating a feeling among people that all NGOs that receive money from abroad are some kind of alien and hostile elements seeking to sow trouble.

Yevgeniy Zhovtis rightly noted that he does not understand the difference between investments in business and in the third sector. Why, when

millions of dollars are invested by American and European companies in our business, absolutely no one cares, no one perceives them as foreign agents. But if we are talking about investments in NGOs, this is immediately a warning sign and a danger. It is believed that such an NGO will fulfill someone's order.

I want to say that in my 20-year practice, there has never been a case where the organization grant of which we won would tell us that we owe it something. This usually works like this: the grant organization announces a competition and topics, we write an application for these topics, and if it seems relevant to it, then it is approved. But no one will ever dictate to an NGO what it should do.

During my internship in the USA, the topic of my research was “Online activism and civil society in Kazakhstan”. After conducting a small survey, I found out in which areas civil society is most active and where it has achieved the greatest results – it is countering domestic violence, protecting women's rights, animal rights, also called the sphere of mass media, the abolition of the death penalty, the fight against torture. All this is due to the constant and unceasing efforts of our civil society. I would like to wish our NGOs to be continuous and persistent in their work, which cannot have an end result, because it is always a process.



U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Kazakhstan **Daniel Rosenblum**:

# A robust civil society is essential for democratic prosperity



*In the interview to AdalAzamat Magazine U.S. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Kazakhstan Daniel Rosenblum shares his opinion on the development of a civil society in the United States, its key role in sustaining democracy and possibilities to apply this experience in other countries. Mr. Rosenblum highlights the importance of independent NGOs in solving social problems, promoting human rights and cooperating with the government, as well as encourages governments of other countries to create an environment for the development of civil societies.*

Question 1: The development of the non-governmental sector in the United States has a long history. Today, American NGOs are an integral part of the social and economic life of the country, and also play an important role at the international level. Mr. Rosenblum, in your opinion, what contributed to the successful activities of NGOs in the United States? And how can other countries seeking to build an effective partnership between the government and the third sector use the experience of developing U.S. civil society?

I completely agree that the United States has a long and rich history of civil society engagement. From the earliest days of U.S. history, civil society organizations have played a key role in advancing citizens' interest, expanding economic opportunity, and protecting human rights. Even as far back as the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville commented in his famous book "Democracy in America" on the tendency of Americans to form voluntary associations. "Americans of all ages, conditions and all dispositions constantly unite together," he wrote, to hold celebrations... build inns, construct churches, distribute books... They establish hospitals, prisons, schools by the same method. Finally, if they wish to high-



« Embrace the diverse nature of civil society, recognizing that NGOs represent a wide spectrum of ideologies and interests »

light a truth or develop an opinion by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association."

De Tocqueville pointed out why this was important to sustaining democracy. First, he argued it was the best way to solve collective problems: "Among democratic nations all citizens are independent and weak; they can achieve almost nothing by themselves and none of them could force his fellows to help him. Therefore, they sink into a state of impotence, if they do not learn to help each other voluntarily." Second, de Tocqueville pointed out that by drawing individuals out of their private concerns and enabling them to be part of something larger, they learned to work with others with different interests and points of view. In this way, those participating in associations became better collaborators, leaders, and citizens. "The only way opinions and ideas can be renewed, hearts enlarged, and human minds developed," Tocqueville observed, "is through the reciprocal influence of people upon each other."



Today, civil society in the United States plays a vital role in mediating between citizens and the government. Representing a broad range of social interests, non-governmental organizations or NGOs take a huge variety of forms, from local sports leagues, special interest clubs and neighborhood associations to groups that defend consumer rights, the civil rights of minorities





« We firmly believe that a robust civil society that is independent of state control or government involvement is necessary for democracy to thrive »

or other vulnerable groups, groups that defend the environment, religious-based charitable organizations, and even professional associations. They provide a voice for the people and help to ensure that the government is responsive to the needs of its citizens. Just as it was 200 years ago when

de Tocqueville visited America, this kind of activity remains necessary to build and maintain a vibrant democratic culture.

Drawing from the U.S. experience, governments aiming to build strong partnerships with their civil society sectors should focus on a few key principles. It is crucial to foster a supportive environment where regulations encourage the creation of NGOs and refrain from making value judgments about their work. Embrace the diverse nature of civil society, recognizing that NGOs represent a wide spectrum of ideologies and interests. Allow space for all voices to contribute to the national dialogue. Finally, remember that NGOs are vital to a healthy democracy. They protect individual rights, drive human progress, and enhance government legitimacy by making governments more accountable, more in tune with the requirements of their citizens.

We firmly believe that a robust civil society that is independent of state control or government involvement is necessary for democracy to thrive. Of course, along with this independence, civil society organizations have responsibilities, too: they must observe the law and must not advocate violence as a way to solve problems. They should also cooperate directly with the government when useful and appropriate to do so, even sometimes carrying out functions or providing services under state contracts. But I cannot stress this enough: as soon as government tries to restrict, manipulate or control civil society, or to use laws and regulations to stifle its development, democracy begins to die.

The United States recognizes that a healthy civil society is not a given. It requires ongoing commitment and support from both the government and the public. We encourage other countries to invest in their own civil societies and to create an environment where NGOs can flourish.

**Question 2: Non-governmental organizations in the United States have achieved the greatest effectiveness in the field of human rights protection and the provision of social services. What areas of NGO activity do you consider the most important for modern society and why?**

Today, there are approximately 1.5 million NGOs operating in the United States. The United States encourages NGO development not just domestically, but throughout the world, because we fervently believe that a thriving civil society is essential for a healthy democracy and a just society.

It is true that NGOs in the United States have a strong track record of protecting human rights and providing social services. But to understand their importance in modern society, we need to look beyond these traditional areas. NGOs are incredibly diverse, addressing a wide spectrum of issues and needs.

Rather than telling you which NGOs I think are the most important, I will say the following: if a country creates the right conditions for NGOs to thrive – conditions that allow them to organize freely and to



« It is important to remember that NGOs come in many forms. Private universities, religious groups, ethnic communities, philanthropic foundations, professional associations, youth clubs, and clubs of people with common hobbies – these can all function as NGOs »



function without undue interference -- then the NGOs that emerge will meet the needs of society. People are smart and care about their communities – given the chance, they will organize themselves to address the most important problems and challenges their communities face.

In today's world, NGOs are fighting for workers' rights, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions. They are helping victims of human trafficking and domestic violence find shelter and rebuild their lives. They're exposing corruption and holding those in power accountable. They are empowering marginalized communities, giving a voice to those who might not otherwise be heard, and advocating for everyone's right to participate in society.

NGOs are tackling environmental challenges, advocating for conservation and pushing for sustainable practices. In the age of information overload, they're helping people navigate the sea of online content, fighting fake news and promoting media literacy. They are even on the front lines of disaster relief, providing essential services and helping communities rebuild after crises.

And let us not forget their role in economic development. They are providing job training, supporting entrepreneurs, and helping people access financial resources. They are working hard to make sure everyone has a chance to prosper, not just a privileged few.

It is important to remember that NGOs come in many forms. Private universities, religious groups, ethnic communities, philanthropic foundations, professional associations, youth clubs, and clubs of people with common hobbies – these can all function as NGOs. They all contribute in their own way to a healthy, dynamic, and diverse civil society.

**Question 3: Mr. Rosenblum, before coming to Kazakhstan, you worked in Uzbekistan, and also have extensive experience in interacting with governments of other Eurasian countries. In your opinion, what urgent problems do civil society institutions face today and what solutions exist to these problems?**

In my twenty-seven years of experience working in and on this region, it is clear that civil society institutions are vital to any democracy, and Kazakhstan is no exception. However, these organizations face significant challenges today.

One such challenge is weak legal frameworks protecting freedom of speech, association, and independent oversight. These freedoms are essential for civil society to thrive. Another challenge is securing financial stability for NGOs. Without adequate funding, it can be difficult for these organizations to sustain their operations and achieve their goals.

Perhaps the biggest challenge arises when governments attempt to silence NGOs, either by refusing to register them or by punishing their members for expressing critical views.

So, what can be done to address these challenges? Governments should promote open dialogue with civil society, leverage the contributions of NGOs to advance the public good, offer transparent and fair grant processes, and foster inclusive policymaking that integrates the input of civil society organizations. Partnerships with international institutions and private business can further bolster these efforts, ensuring the sustainability and impact of civil society.

Ultimately, a thriving civil society requires a commitment from both government and citizens to embrace open discourse, respect diverse perspectives, and work together to address shared challenges. This process is not always easy, but in the end, it helps ensure that governments remain responsive to their citizens' needs.

**Question 4: The support of the United States greatly contributed to the development of the civil sector in Kazakhstan at the dawn of our country's independence. Thanks to the small grants program, Kazakhstani NGOs could participate in the implementation of projects under the auspices of international and American organizations and foundations and gained the necessary experience and knowledge. Today, our state strives to involve the civil sector in solving significant social problems, allocates grants for NGOs. President**



« The United States remains committed to supporting Kazakhstan in its democratic reform endeavors »

**of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev announced the implementation of political and economic reforms that affect the third sector NGOs. How do you assess the ongoing changes in our country?**

The United States has long supported Kazakhstan in its journey to develop a robust and independent civil society. As I previously mentioned, we recognize the important role that NGOs play in promoting democracy, protecting human rights, and advancing economic development.

We are encouraged by the direction of the announced reforms in Kazakhstan, particularly those aimed at creating a «Listening State» and a «Just Kazakhstan.» More inclusive and representative processes result in government decisions that are better informed and more likely to achieve sustainable development that benefits all Kazakhs. These reforms recognize the importance of soliciting and learning from the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders,

including civil society. If achieved and consistently implemented, these reforms will move Kazakhstan further along its road to democracy.

Building a strong civil society is a journey, and friends offer each other support and honesty along the way. We engage with our Kazakhstani counterparts, sharing our experience and perspective and providing constructive feedback when it is warranted. Failing to do would be a true disservice to our partnership and shared goals.

The United States remains committed to supporting Kazakhstan in its democratic reform endeavors. We will continue providing assistance when requested aimed at increasing transparency, strengthening the rule of law, and bolstering civil society. At the risk of repeating myself, I will say again that a strong and vibrant civil society is essential for Kazakhstan's continued progress and prosperity.



**Question 5: What positive achievements do you see in the development of the civil sector in Kazakhstan, and what else needs to be worked on? What do you think can improve the activity of non-governmental organizations? And what role does the state play in this process?**

The United States recognizes the significant strides Kazakhstan has made in developing its civil sector, particularly through recent legislation protecting citizens against violence and exploitation. The new laws on domestic violence and human trafficking are especially noteworthy and were adopted, in part, due to civil society advocacy over many years. We are also pleased to support reform initiatives like decentralization, shifting resources and responsibility to local government bodies.

At the same time, however, we remain concerned about signs of increasing pressure and restrictions on independent media and certain civil society groups. We encourage the government to create and protect space for open dialogue and diverse perspectives, as a healthy society thrives on collaboration between these sectors. By creating an enabling environment for civil society, promoting inclusivity, and actively engaging with NGOs, the government can help unlock the full potential of the third sector.

As Kazakhstan continues its journey of democratic development, it is important to maintain open dialogue and address challenges as they arise. This includes ensuring that the legal and judicial system protects, and does not limit, fundamental freedoms; promoting transparency and accountability in government; and fostering an environment where diverse voices are tolerated and can be heard. Along the way of this journey, the United States will continue to share lessons learned from our own 250 years of democracy-building, in the hopes that Kazakhstan can avoid some of our mistakes. We offer our experience and support in a spirit of partnership, recognizing that every democracy faces unique challenges, and that we all have room to grow.

**Question 6: In 2021, USAID, in cooperation with the Executive Directorate of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, launched the Oasis project, which aims to restore the**

**ecosystem of the drained seabed. Governments, NGOs, and communities have joined together to combat the environmental disaster in the Central Asian region. What, in your opinion, is the peculiarity of this initiative, and why is the project important from the point of view of international participation?**

I agree the Oasis project has been important. It demonstrates the power of international collaboration in addressing environmental challenges. This project, part of USAID's larger Environmental Restoration of the Aral Sea Activity, aims to restore the ecosystem of the drained seabed and mitigate the devastating effects of the Aral Sea ecological disaster.

What makes Oasis effective is its multi-faceted approach. It brings together governments, NGOs, and local communities to work towards a common goal. This collaborative effort is crucial for tackling complex environmental problems that transcend borders. The project also serves as a model for addressing the impacts of climate change and the growing water crisis in Central Asia.

The importance of international collaboration in this project cannot be overstated. The Aral Sea disaster is a transboundary issue that requires a coordinated response from all stakeholders. By working together, countries can share knowledge, pool resources, and develop innovative solutions to restore the Aral Sea ecosystem and improve the livelihoods of the people affected by this environmental crisis.

The Oasis project is not only about environmental restoration; it is also about building resilience and promoting sustainable development in the region around the Aral Sea. By investing in projects like Oasis, we are investing in a healthier and more prosperous future for Central Asia. We look forward to continued collaboration with Kazakhstan on other pressing issues such as climate change, the green energy transition, water scarcity, and food security.

**Question 7: Kazakhstan attaches great importance to strengthening both trade and economic cooperation with the United States, as well as cooperation in the field**



« The Oasis project is not only about environmental restoration; it is also about building resilience and promoting sustainable development in the region around the Aral Sea. By investing in projects like Oasis, we are investing in a healthier and more prosperous future for Central Asia»

**of technology development, science and joint projects, cultural and humanitarian ties. What promising areas can you mention for the development of cooperation with Kazakhstan? What new programs and initiatives could be implemented?**

The United States and Kazakhstan have enjoyed a strong partnership for the past 33 years, and we continually seek ways to deepen our cooperation. We are pleased to see growing interest from U.S. companies exploring trade and investment opportunities in Kazakhstan, particularly as the country diversifies its economy in sectors like artificial intelligence, IT, critical minerals, and food processing. While global competition is fierce, Kazakhstan has much to offer, and we actively promote these opportunities to American businesses.

Likewise, we see increased interest in Kazakh investment in the United States. Last year, our Commercial Service team led a delegation of 14 Kazakh companies to Select USA – the annual premier foreign direct

investment conference in the United States. We were also pleased to host a business mission in October, which allowed 13 American companies to explore further economic cooperation; U.S. participants ranged from digital technology companies to oil and gas to infrastructure and construction.

Here in Central Asia, USAID supports regional economic initiatives, including projects to strengthen and streamline customs infrastructure and promote private sector growth. These efforts have facilitated significant U.S. investment in Kazakhstan, resulting in \$46 million in new investments and 6,000 new jobs over the past several years. The annual Central Asian Trade Forum further fosters regional and international business development.

The United States' partnership with Kazakhstan has a bright future. By continuing to work together, we can achieve even greater progress and build a more peaceful and prosperous future for the citizens of both our nations.



Nurken Asanov:

# Conscious parenting is a culture that we must form together

*How to make conscious parenting the norm, what challenges are facing the modern family and how can public initiatives transform society? Nurken Asanov, founder of RNGO Senimen Bolashak, Vice President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan shares his personal experience, inspiration and successful projects that help parents in Kazakhstan cope with modern challenges.*

– Nurken Zharylkapovich, what prompted you to create the RNGO Senimen Bolashak and draw public attention to the issues of educating the younger generation, promoting cultural and family values, as well as development of third sector in Kazakhstan?

– I believe that showing civic awareness and civic responsibility SHOULD BE the NORM for every citizen. It is our civic duty to benefit society and the motherland.

In my understanding, a person's duty is to contribute to the prosperity of his native country.

In the course of our main activity, my partners and I, as a social responsibility business, paid attention to charity and support for civic initiatives. But such help and support were chaotic, that is, they were not structured.

In the spring of 2019, during the pandemic and lockdown, the whole world switched to a remote work format. This situation has given citizens, and me in particular, the opportunity to spend time with children, to talk with them.

Then, as a result of conversation with my eldest daughter, I realized that for a child, TIME SPENT



WITH PARENTS, in particular with fathers, is of PARTICULAR VALUE, since we are fathers, we are often busy with work issues and do not devote enough time to children.

The involvement of parents in the parenting process, our participation in their lives, our interest in their feelings, worries, and desires – that's what our children really expect from us!

Conversation with my eldest daughter prompted me to create a parent association in order to form a culture of CONSCIOUS PARENTING in society and support parents in the upbringing of the younger generation!

Children are the future of the country! That is why it is necessary to give them proper education, instill in them a sense of patriotism and love for the motherland, the desire to contribute to the development and prosperity of the country.

- What, in your opinion, are the main challenges facing the Kazakh society today? To what extent can NGOs contribute to positive changes in society?

- We live in an era of rapid changes that also affect civic activism. At Senimen Bolashak, we identify 5 social changes (challenges, if you like) that, in our opinion, have a key impact on modern civic activism. By modern, I mean a difference of only 10-15 years.

These are:

**1. The increase in the speed of information exchange and communication in modern society.** Modern technologies have significantly accelerated the communication process. This, in turn, contributes to the rapid dissemination of ideas and mobilization of resources for civic initiatives. From recent examples, we can see how social networks allow reporting problems instantly, coordinating volunteer assistance and conducting online campaigns.

**2. Increasing the role of the virtual world in human life.**

Significant part of our social activities today can take place in the virtual space. Decisions made in the virtual world have a direct impact on human behavior in real life.

**3. Openness and observability of public processes and the picture of private life.**

Openness and observability stimulate citizens' participation in public processes and increase their willingness to take active action. Recent examples related to the online

broadcast of the trial are vivid examples of this trend.

**4. Political changes, formation of new "social contract", Just Kazakhstan.**

The reforms of our President are aimed at revising and updating the principles of interaction between the state and society. These reforms will encourage citizens to participate more actively in public and political life.

**5. Growth of inclusion (involvement of all social groups).** Growth of inclusion promotes social justice and strengthens the unity of society. At Senimen Bolashak, we have the principle that the status of "parent" is the same for everyone.

– Can you tell us about the projects that you are particularly proud of. How do you help Kazakhstani parents to deal with modern challenges? What initiatives do you consider the most effective for promoting family values?

– Senimen Bolashak has representation (branches) in 16 regions of Kazakhstan.

Our employees hold about 200-300 events of various formats with the parent community every month. Thanks to parental feedback and country-specific sociological research, which we initiate annually, it becomes possible to identify the key problems faced by modern families, parents, and their children. Next, we form thematic agendas in order to help them overcome these difficulties.

It is worth noting that each region has its own request – what most worries the parent community, and taking into account the identified urgent problems of each region, we are launching social projects aimed at identifying the problem, finding solutions,

contributing to the development of society, reducing social tension.

Each of these projects is a reason for pride.

For example, in the West Kazakhstan region, the project "Zhaksylyk zhasap zharysaiyk" was implemented – volunteer work was carried out with schools in the direction of preventing offenses among adolescents; in Karaganda, this is the project "Ziyandy adetterdin aldyn alu", which drew public attention to the problem of mass use of vapes and tobacco smoking devices among young people. In Kyzylorda – 2 projects – "Reproductivti densaulyk" – "Reproductive health" and "Senin Bolashagyn" (school of a young family, prevention of divorce); in Astana – "TATULYQ" (prevention of domestic violence); North Kazakhstan region – career guidance (assistance to the younger generation in professional self-determination and employment according to the specialty); Zhambyl region – "Your choice" (Training program on personal growth for adolescents from risk categories); Kostanay – "Through knowledge to

understanding and trust” (knowledge aimed at preventing bullying through improving the competence of parents in schools in the city) and many other projects.

I would like to highlight the project of the Pavlodar branch – Bolashak zhenimpaz, related to mentoring and preparing teenagers for choosing a profession, increasing their life potential. Life mentoring project created to support children in difficult life situations so that they can make the right choice, set benchmarks, draw the contours of their future with them and lead them to the effective implementation of their goals and objectives. This includes choosing a specialty in the future. Choosing a hobby. Meaningful spiritual growth.

The project was completed last year, but at the request of the children it was extended until 2026. It has shown its long-term durability. This indicates the success and relevance of the project.

Despite the positive results achieved, we are faced with the task of transforming the institution of support for children without parental care. It is necessary to improve the existing system of social and infrastructural support, and at the same time increase public support in order to turn society into a real family for each of them.

In addition to projects, we initiated and conducted social research on such topics as “Impact of social networks on a teenager’s interaction with the environment”, the purpose of which was to study aspects of the impact of social networks (content platforms and messengers) on a teenager’s relationships with parents and family, peers and virtual friends” and country study on “Portrait of modern parent” – which showed that a modern Kazakh parent is a WOMAN and revealed the need to actively involve fathers in the process of upbringing the younger generation.

**– Why did the idea to create a parent association arise? What issues does this association solve? A couple of decades ago, the authority of parents, and especially the father, was indisputable in our society. What is the role of the father in the modern family?**

– The family is the social unit. It depends on the family, on the parents, how we will raise our children, the younger generation and what Kazakhstan will be like in the future.

Parenthood is a science, it is work, it is an art that needs to be studied in order to apply the knowl-

edge and skills acquired for the good: in order to raise our children happy and decent citizens of the country.

Understanding this led me to create a parent association.

At Senimen Bolashak, we focus on the practice of parenthood in Kazakhstan, as mega important institution for forming the image of future citizens of our country.

Our main mission is formation of a culture of conscious parenting in Kazakh society, increasing the responsibility of parents in raising children, increasing the knowledge and skills of parents in Kazakhstan.

In addition to the knowledge and skills acquired by parents on our sites, it is worth noting other important advantages that parents who are members of the association have, these are interaction and support for each other, exchange of personal experience in parenting issues. We are not just a parent association, we are an association of like-minded people!

As for the question of the role of the father in the modern family...

Father has always been and continues to be the supporter of the family, the breadwinner, our main task is to provide the family with everything necessary. However, this does not exempt us from the responsibility of upbringing our children. Today we see the need for active involvement of the father in the life of the child, in the process of upbringing the younger generation.

As I noted earlier, the involvement of parents, and in particular fathers, in the process of upbringing, our interest and active participation in the lives of children – that’s what children really expect from us!

The modern father is not only responsible for the life, health and well-being of the child, he pays attention to the quality of spending time with him and shows sensitivity in relationships.

Every year, with your participation, a Parents’ Forum is held in the regions of the country. How do you assess the impact of these meetings on the lives of the participants? Are there any results and achievements?

– Parents’ forum is unique. Every year we organize and hold parent conferences, which can rightfully be considered a dialogue platform between government agencies, representatives of the education sector and the PARENT COMMUNITY.

Here we not only discuss topical issues related to



**“OUR MAIN MISSION IS FORMATION OF A CULTURE OF CONSCIOUS PARENTING IN KAZAKH SOCIETY, INCREASING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS IN RAISING CHILDREN, INCREASING THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF PARENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN”**

the younger generation: children’s health, safety and rights, issues of upbringing and education, but also look for ways to solve the problems and modern challenges facing the parent community today.

Also, in addition to parent conferences, since its foundation, Senimen Bolashak has regularly held forums for fathers with the self-explanatory name – “Ake, men senin omirinin zhalgasymyn”, in order to actively involve fathers in the parenting process.

Organizing about 200-300 events a month (in 16 regions of the country), we noted that this year the number of men from the total number of participants in parent meetings increased by 35% compared to the last year.

These changes indicate that our work to involve fathers in the upbringing of children is yielding results and has a positive impact on family relations and children’s development.

**– In your opinion, what can the state do to strengthen the institution of the family, support children and parents?**

– Speaking at the II Republican Forum of deputies of Maslikhats of all levels in October this year, the President paid attention to a number of important issues, including the promotion of the idea of responsible parenthood in the country.

The President instructed to launch a public campaign in the country aimed at promoting the ideas of responsible parenthood.

As you can see, the President’s agenda finds a direct response in the activities of Senimen Bolashak, aimed at CREATING a CULTURE of CONSCIOUS PARENTHOOD in Kazakhstan.

This year our organization marked three years since foundation

For three years, Senimen Bolashak has been uniting parents from all over Kazakhstan around



problematic issues of parenthood and child-parent relations.

Over these three years, we have conducted more than 20 thousand events for the parent community, including republican parent forums, among which “ATA-ANA – ULTTYN UYASY”.

The name of the forum was not chosen by chance, because the foundation of happy childhood has always been and will always be the institution of the family.

Answering the question of what the State can do, I note that the state is working on the above issue.

We, as the third sector, as representatives of non-governmental organizations, as caring people with an active civic position on this issue, are LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE AND ALLIES OF STATE STRUCTURES.

We do not need funding from the state, we only want to support our initiatives and fruitful cooperation for the benefit of every Kazakh family.

As a citizen of Kazakhstan, I see improvements in our country and see areas of growth, and I also understand that strengthening the institution of the family, supporting children and parents is not a matter of one day.

This is a SYSTEMATIC WORK OF government agencies and the third sector. The concept of “consistency” implies an orderly and structured approach to completing tasks and, above all, CONSISTENCY in work.

Constant and stable pace, regular and consistent progress, despite possible obstacles or changes in circumstances, in other words, consistency in work allows us to ensure stable results not only in the short term, but also in the long term.

**– What does, in your opinion, conscious parent mean? What message would you like to convey to young people and Kazakhstanis with an active civic position?**

– By holding regular meetings with the parent community, we have come to a common understanding of the “portrait of a conscious parent”: the qualities and competencies that such parent should possess.

Thus, as per understanding of “Senimen Bolashak”, a conscious parent is NOT an IDEAL PARENT. This is a parent with two important competencies – responsibility and sensitivity.

You don’t need to have superpowers and idealize parenthood and the parenting process.

If you are responsible for the life, health and well-being of a child, if you show sensitivity towards child, child’s personality, feelings and needs, then you can rightfully consider yourself a conscious parent.

As for my message to the youth, it would sound like this: learn, develop, make progress, pay attention to spiritual growth. It is necessary to cover your material needs, but without spiritual growth, cultural development, and charity, material goods will not bring happiness to you, your environment, or society.

Regarding the message to Kazakhstanis with an active civic position... I will answer with one sentence “Tektiler Tu koteredi – teksizder shu koteredi”. I’ll explain what it means.

The word “Tektiler” in translation means “honourable people” – these are those people who lead society to prosperity and well-being, without making too much noise, raising the flag as a symbol uniting the people under one leadership, with one goal – to move forward to a brighter future.

Honourless people tend to make a fuss, but not to take action. To speak, but not to do. To slander, condemn and discuss, BUT in no way to create, forgive and create.

I believe that Kazakhstanis with an active civic position are honourable people, active personalities who want goodness, peace and benefits for the people of our country and these are the people who correspond to the understanding “tektilik”.

We should all strive to understand honour and make only positive changes in society, with good intentions and deeds, without making too much noise.

**– Nurken Zharylkapovich, you are actively conducting educational work, publishing books in the Kazakh language. Can you tell us about this area of activity. Why is this important to you, and who helps you bring your ideas to life?**

– In addition to our main activity on formation of a culture of conscious parenthood in society, we pay attention to the promotion of the works of great Kazakh thinkers, the republication of their outstanding works.

This is one of the 5 forms of work of “Senimen Bolashak”.

To date, we have republished the works of the Alash intellectuals: “OYAN, KAZAKH!” by Mirzhakip Dulatuly; “El buginshil, meniki yertengi ushin” by Akhmet Baitursynuly; “Pedagogy” by Magzhan Zhumabayev; “Psychology” and “Tarbiege zhetekshisi” by Zhusipbek Aimaurov.

At the same time, book on psychology with the same name – “PSYCHOLOGY” and a book by the founder and developer of the original concept of humane pedagogy Shalva Amonashvili, which is named after the methodology itself – “Humane Pedagogy”, have been translated into Kazakh language. All these books in the amount of 10,000 copies are distributed free of charge to the parent community and teachers.

In addition, in May last year (author’s note – 2023) to commemorate the 165th anniversary of the Great Kazakh poet and ethnographer Mashkhur Zhusup, we have republished his works, which represent the publication of five selected volumes of the writer’s works in a new academic form. The leading scientists of the Mukhtar Auezov Institute of Literature and Art (T.Kydyr, A.Oralbek, Zh.Saltakova, N.Mursalimova, K. Mustafayeva) worked on textual studies and research written by the poet in these five volumes. Five volumes were donated to 100 schools, 100 libraries, 100 mosques and 100 universities in the republic.

In October of the same year, thanks to our support, the book “Abai gibratnamasy” was published, representing a scientific work in which we see Abai through the eyes of scientists, historians and researchers.

I suggested to the author of the work, who is an Honored Worker of Kazakhstan, professor, literary critic – Serik Nygmetollauly Negimov, to write a book in a popular and accessible form for the general reader, for our contemporaries, so that it reaches the consciousness of young people.

All of the above is our contribution to the enlightenment and spiritual development of our people, the formation of cultural values among the younger generation.

**– As a Vice President of CAK, what tasks do you set for yourself?**

– As Vice-president of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, I set myself the goal of showing by my own

example and by the example of Senimen Bolashak the possibility of making positive social changes.

I believe that as an entrepreneur, businessman who has created a sustainable, successful project not funded by the state – the Republican non-government organization “Senimen Bolashak”, I set an example to other entrepreneurs, business people.

As for Senimen Bolashak, we have ALREADY become trendsetters of positive changes in society and the country. Here I mean not only our main activity on formation of culture of conscious parenthood in Kazakhstan, but also the corporate culture of our Organization, through which we have a positive impact on everyone we come into contact with in the process of work.

For example, in order to popularize books and reading, on Monday we fixed a reminder of the daily half-hour reading of the book; every Wednesday we have “Ulttyk kun” – the day of Kazakh culture and national traditions; on Thursday – vitamin day – we take care of the health of our employees; Friday – “Zhaksylyk zhasap zharysayyk” – the Day of Kindness, On this day, we remind others of the need to do good – in word and deed.

I also want to note that in this March we initiated the creation of new meanings and approaches to the celebration of Nauryz, setting a new trend in society so that our compatriots would look at this holiday from a different angle.

We drew some parallels with the celebration of the New Year and proposed alternative solutions to the celebration of Nauryz. I am glad that the new approaches we have proposed have received a positive response not only from our parents, but also from our like-minded people, i.e. organizations with which we actively cooperate, including government agencies.

We are TRENDSETTERS of POSITIVE changes in society.

In general, the well-being of our children and the issues of building a bright future directly affect certain social structures and we are the VANGUARDS of such positive changes/transformations in society. We are restructuring public relations.

THUS, WE WANT TO SHOW THAT POSITIVE CHANGES IN SOCIETY ARE POSSIBLE IF WE APPROACH THIS ISSUE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF CONSISTENCY, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, FEELINGS OF PATRIOTISM, LOVE FOR THE MOTHERLAND!

**Gulnar Kurbanbayeva:**

# How does NGOs help citizens to participate in the governance of the country

*Initiatives of the non-governmental sector encourage the population to actively participate in the life of the State. According to Gulnar Kurbanbayeva, Vice-President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, the contribution of civil society to the development of the country cannot be overestimated. In an interview with Adal Azamat magazine, a leader with extensive experience in the field of NGOs shared her vision of the necessary reforms in sectoral legislation, and also spoke about the importance of using the potential of NGOs to solve large-scale social problems.*

**– Gulnar Turetayevna, can you tell us what the non-governmental sector of Kazakhstan is today and what tasks it faces?**

– The positive attitude of the state towards the activities of NGOs has contributed to the growth of the civil sector in our country. At the dawn of Kazakhstan's independence, we had about five to six hundred public organizations. Today more than 23 thousand are officially registered. Currently, these NGOs work with certain categories of citizens or are engaged in human rights work. As a rule, public associations are created in specific territories to solve local problems in a separate microdistrict, settlement or region. At first glance, it seems that for 20 million Kazakhstanis, we have a fairly large number of NGOs. If you look at countries such as Poland, Bulgaria or other very compact states that were once part of the socialist camp together with the Soviet Union, there are up to hundreds of thousands of NGOs in them. This comparison is no longer in our favor, isn't it? But that's not even the point. It is important to understand how much of the population is covered by the activities of non-governmental organizations. Because the more people who can use the services



of NGOs, the more effective the work of the civil sector will be. According to experts, today only 5-10% of Kazakhstanis are involved in projects of social activists and receive specific support from non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan. Reasonable question arises: how to ensure the participation of the remaining 90% of citizens in the public life of the country through NGOs and make social assistance available to all. This is a complex task, which is currently being addressed by the non-governmental sector in partnership with the State.

The main mission of the NGO is to improve people's lives by developing local social initiatives. For example, not every citizen of Kazakhstan can afford to pay for commercial training courses

in economics, the basics of budgeting or gain knowledge of a new profession. Yes, employment centers provide such services, but only for the unemployed. In this regard, NGOs can become an assistant, any citizens, not only of privileged categories, can apply to them for help and receive the necessary support in the form of opening a sewing workshop or organizing events. There are a lot of public associations in the country specializing in providing a wide variety of services - from psychological counseling, sports rehabilitation to the implementation of environmental initiatives. Why are non-governmental organizations doing this? Because they make up the part of the civil society active population that understands that if we want qualitative changes in life, we need to start doing something ourselves.

**– To what extent does the current legislation encourage NGOs to effectively implement their mission? Are there any changes needed here?**

– Kazakhstan has laid a serious foundation for legislation affecting the activities of NGOs. Over the years of independence, laws have been adopted regulating various forms of non-profit organizations. These are political parties, trade unions, religious associations, charitable foundations, etc. The State actively assists in creation of regulatory documents regulating the ways of interaction between the public sector and civil society. We have developed laws on public councils, on public control, on peaceful assemblies, and in recent years they have undergone significant changes for the better. But there are also problems that lie in the lack of necessary regulatory legal acts related to state support for NGOs and development of appropriate infrastructure.

What difficulties are NGOs facing today? In the current legislation, an NGO is considered as a separate organizational form, the purpose of which

is not related to profit-making. It must be admitted that at the level of the law, NGOs do have some tax preferences. Thus, non-profit organizations are exempt from income tax (CIT) if they receive sponsorship, charitable money or fulfill a state social order. However, NGOs are forced to pay taxes on transport, property, and advertising on an equal basis with commercial organizations. It is important to note, for example, a charitable foundation or an environmental NGO works for the benefit of society, unlike SMEs, they are not focused on generating income. They need to pay office rent, utility costs, and employee salaries, but the state does not take this into account when providing a state grant or a state social order. This is a serious expense item for any organization. Therefore, it is extremely necessary for us to clearly formulate and consolidate the mission of a non-governmental organization, its goals and objectives, and principles of work in legislation. It is also important to determine for the implementation of the mission and goals of an NGO how much and how to pay taxes, receive loans, and various kinds of permits. When all these points are regulated, a demarcation line between commercial and non-commercial economic entities will immediately arise.

For NGOs as organizations of public interest with activities aimed at improving the lives of the country's population as a whole and certain categories of citizens (youth, pensioners, children with disabilities), more favorable tax conditions should be created by law. In particular, such NGOs, in my opinion, should be exempt from paying transport tax, and it is advisable to equate them with individuals in terms of other taxes. The funds that NGOs currently spend on mandatory payments to the budget could be used for socially significant projects.

One more significant point. We need to improve the image of an NGO employee, as well as strengthen the responsibility of government agen-

***"The main mission of the NGO is to improve people's lives by developing local social initiatives"***





cies for formal attitude to the recommendations of the non-governmental sector. I think it is extremely important to introduce the institute of NGO expertise. As a function, it exists within the framework of public control and public expert councils. They verbally agree with us, but in fact the opinion of NGOs does not affect the final decision-making. The introduction of mandatory expert assessment on LSIs from NGOs would improve the quality of state legislative initiatives, providing a more in-depth analysis of their consequences for society. It is at least unwise not to use the powerful potential of the civil sector today. NGOs are already contributing to the improvement of the economic and social climate in the country, as well as in formation of local self-government. There are excellent examples of how NGOs can make a significant contribution to the development of their region, even more effectively than government agencies. Thus, the Pavlodar Geographical Club has created a detailed tourist guide to the region: indicating transport routes and hotels. Until 2018, the organization held Irtysh Day annually, the holiday attracted tourists from Russia and neighboring countries.

Such initiatives need to be supported, since it is NGOs, unlike government agencies, that can build effective interaction with the population and business structures as potential partners in the



interests of their region. For example, in Kostanay region, a regional NGO launched an eco-project in a small settlement, local residents organized separate garbage collection and environmentally friendly farming. Children were given nitratometers, and now they control the quality of fruits and vegetables, preventing the import of products with harmful additives. Such self-government is formed naturally, without unnecessary bureaucracy, and extends to other settlements in the region. The State should see NGOs not only as public supervisors, but also as partners who are able to maintain local public order and make a real contribution to improving people's quality of life. When vital issues are resolved, people do not need to go to rallies. In this regard, the role of the civil sector in the development of state is invaluable, this is the people's participation in the governance of the country.

#### – What are the difficulties in the process of forming the state social order and allocating grants?

– We have done a lot of work to create clear and objective rules governing the distribution of grants and public procurement for NGOs. Unfortunately, the grant financing mechanism does not work exactly as it should. Today, grants are most often received by those who know how to write

applications, rather than those who implement large, serious projects. This problem is especially true in rural areas. Nevertheless, experience and knowledge are already competing at the regional and republican levels. In this part, probably, unspoken ethical rules should be included. By the way, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan is currently working on the creation of Ethical Code of NGOs, where it plans to regulate all these nuances. It is clear that due to the imperfection of legislation, public associations are forced to look for financial sources for their existence, therefore they are ready to go to any region. Nevertheless, we urge you to show solidarity with your colleagues, you should not pursue financing to the detriment of the interests of people who really need our NGO assistance. First of all, let's support local NGOs by helping them develop self-help problem solving skills and effective resource management. From my own experience, when I headed the Civil Alliance of the Karaganda region, we had to settle for state social order in districts and rural areas and hold events there, because sometimes rural NGOs were not ready for this work. But we were mainly engaged in coordination, and district and rural NGOs under our patronage worked directly on projects, learned to interact with akimats and the population, and gradually got back on their feet. In order to maximize the involvement of local NGOs in the implementation of state grants, rules have been developed, which are currently under approval. According to NGO proposals, they provide for requirements for an expert commission, which selects the winners of grant funding, including evaluation criteria and indicators, as well as requirements for applications, reports, monitoring, etc. Most of the proposals from the non-governmental sector have already been approved, and we hope that a new grant financing procedure will be adopted soon.

#### – What can be done to improve the financial situation of NGOs?

– This is the next block of issues that is not yet being considered by the government. We are talking about state support for NGOs. What do I mean by that? The country has state support for entrepreneurship, Kazakhstanis are given the opportunity to be self-employed, create small businesses, microenterprises, and they are actively helped in this. Representatives of small and medium-sized businesses are trained at the expense of the state, sent on internships, and free consulting centers operate for them. That is, non-financial assistance is very developed in the business sector. There are no such large-scale support measures for NGOs. In the non-governmental sector, the budget of organizations is determined by the state social order, with the help of this mechanism, NGO resource centers receive funds for training courses and grants for local public associations. Again, in most cases, resource centers are forced to rent premises, which requires significant costs and diverts funds from their main activities. Some organizations do not have the opportunity to rent an office, so they hold meetings in employees' apartments or temporarily rented sites. Of course, the Civic Alliance helps such NGOs and provides its resources free of charge, but in general, non-financial support for NGOs in the long term remains a difficult task.

In my opinion, an effective solution could be the creation of NGO Houses similar to the existing Friendship Houses in the regions that the state provides to national cultural centers for work. Such houses could act as permanent and accessible venues for NGO meetings and events, providing centralized coverage of utility and rental costs at the expense of local budgets. Ideally, our NGOs could unite with cultural centers and create points of attraction for public organizations on the

***“Such initiatives need to be supported, since it is NGOs, unlike government agencies, that can build effective interaction with the population and business structures as potential partners in the interests of their region”***

***“The funds that NGOs currently spend on mandatory payments to the budget could be used for socially significant projects”***

basis of Friendship Houses not only in regional centers, but also in other localities. State should be interested in developing measures to support the third sector. Why? It's simple, it's cost-effective for the budget. The cost of NGO services is usually 5-6 times lower than the market price. The same marketing seminars or financial literacy trainings for private traders can cost from 30 to 200 thousand tenge per person, as part of state order, NGOs provide them for 20-25 thousand. Thus, the state, by helping to create NGO houses for us, in return can receive high-quality services from professionals working in the non-governmental sector. NGOs often employ a large number of highly qualified specialists, especially among psychologists, educators, rehabilitologists and marketers. According to expert estimates, about 10,000 people with academic degrees and two or more higher education are involved in the non-governmental sector. Not every private institution is able to invite such an expert. Meanwhile, these people are ready to train public sector specialists for various industries. Each region has its own unique needs, somewhere it is important to develop consulting or IT technologies, somewhere the focus is shifted to entrepreneurship, traditional crafts. All this is possible to implement without huge costs. It should be understood that qualified NGO specialists have a powerful motivation to work to improve people's lives. Often certified trainers, which I also belong to, give lectures for free or teach at a symbolic price when they understand that they are working for a meaningful goal.

It is also important for us to promote measures to support public organizations at the legislative level, for example, to provide NGOs with the opportunity to receive preferential loans. Now social entrepreneurship has been included in the Business Roadmap. Why not expand this support to NGOs that are also engaged in social

entrepreneurship? I consider it necessary to consolidate legislative guarantees of financial and non-financial support for NGOs so that public organizations have access to all the necessary infrastructure to implement their projects and social mission.

**– Among public figures, I have heard about the need to develop a separate law on NGOs. What do you think about this?**

– I'm sure such a law is needed. Two years ago, members of the Working Group at the Ministry of Culture and Information (then it was the Ministry of Culture and Information) discussed issues of reforming sectoral legislation. There were proposals to terminate the law on public associations, which in fact only lists organizational and legal obligations. Then there were attempts to amend this law, to provide for the specifics of legal relations between commercial and non-profit organizations. As a result, together with the partners of the Civil Alliance, we came to the conclusion that it is necessary to develop a separate law on non-governmental organizations, activities of which are of public interest. It should be based on principles related to the observance of human rights. In his speeches, the President of the country has repeatedly noted the need for active involvement of civil society in the decision-making process of the state, it is the population that should outline guidelines and develop local self-government. This means that there is the issue of creating an appropriate law, which will provide for areas of interaction between the non-governmental sector and the state. It is NGOs with a public interest that are able and should help the state. The task of the non-governmental sector is not to criticize the actions of government agencies, but to help improve the situation where solutions need to

be finalized. To do this, NGOs, along with the Atameken Chamber of Entrepreneurs, should be legally empowered to conduct an alternative analysis of the regulatory impact of decisions taken by the state. In simple language, non-governmental organizations should have the right to send for correction or even veto an adopted law, by-law, strategy or action plan, of course, with all the arguments provided. In fact, we are talking about strengthening public control in the NGO sector, taking into account the status of non-governmental organizations. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Public Control” adopted last year.

Today, despite the lack of resources, the NGO sector continues to improve and make a significant contribution to the development of various spheres of life. Many initiatives - from support for private entrepreneurship to the creation of expert councils - initially appeared among NGOs. The sector demonstrates a tremendous impact on the development of society and ability to initiate positive changes, which are then implemented at the legislative level.

The proposed new law on NGOs is necessary to increase the level of development of non-governmental organizations, their financial, organizational and material stability, which would regulate the issues of different, simplified procedure for creating NGOs, preferential taxation, exclusive legal status in dialogue with government structures and quasi-public sector (strategic partnership), financing exclusively NGOs in the form of state grants and awards and other things.

This law will create real conditions for creation of a strong non-governmental sector of the country, improve the quality and effectiveness of NGO activities, and participate in the development of Just Kazakhstan.

The NGO Law is supposed to solve the following tasks:

- formation of highly qualified non-governmental sector through the creation of appropriate infrastructure for training and development of NGOs
- ensuring the financial stability of NGO activities through the introduction of features of state financial support, the taxation system.
- improving the effectiveness of the implementation of socio-economic programs and projects of the state by transferring

certain state functions to the non-governmental sector

- improving the image of NGOs in society.

Our proposal for a separate law on NGOs is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information, as well as deputies, and this is very valuable. The signed strategic partnership agreement between the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan and the MCI has become a good example of constructive cooperation. Such cooperation (strategic partnership) should be extended to the regional level, where each region has its own priorities and tasks. This should also be included in the law on NGOs. Perhaps this document will not solve all the issues at once, but it can become a solid basis for strengthening the role of civil society in Kazakhstan.

**– What tasks do you think the Concept of Civil society Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan should solve? The Ministry of Culture and Information has announced changes to this document in the near future.**

– Making changes to the Concept of the development of civil society is a joint effort. It is currently being handled by the Ministry of Culture and Information, as well as the Committee on Civil Society Affairs. They will organize working groups in which we will participate. This document is extremely important for the sector as a strategic guideline, a kind of roadmap for the further development of NGOs. The current version of the Concept does not fully reflect the realities and prospects of the transformation of civil society. Therefore, the new document should clearly specify plans, provide for all issues, including the competence of non-governmental organizations, improving the work of advisory bodies and public control, etc. It is essential that mechanisms appear in the strategic document that really reform the activities of the sector. We need to raise the status of NGOs, regulate their legal relations with the state, and strengthen their legal powers. It is necessary to support civil initiative and legislate information support for NGOs so that society better understands the functions and role of public organizations in the life of the country. All this must be done in accordance with the current legislation. Moreover, I believe that the updated Concept can become a starting point for drafting a law on NGOs.



**Zhumagali Bilisbekov:**

# Civil society should be a free and independent partner of the state

In an interview with Adal Azamat magazine, Zhumagali Bilisbekov, President of Shymkent Civil Alliance, spoke about the key areas of development of the NGO sector in Kazakhstan, the role of civil society in public control and its interaction with the state. He shared his thoughts on how to strengthen the independence and financial stability of NGOs, as well as the importance of partnership and professional growth of organizations to solve socially significant tasks.

– Zhumagali Dauletbekovich, can you tell us exactly what you do in the Shymkent Civil Alliance. What problems do you have to face, what initiatives and projects have already been implemented? What do you see as the main purpose of your work?

– When it comes to the Shymkent Civil Alliance, I would say that our main goal is to support civil society and develop socially significant initiatives that make people's lives better and fairer. Managing the Alliance, I am responsible for strategic planning: This means that my team and I define the main directions of our work, set goals and develop projects that are aimed at solving issues relevant to our city.

In cooperation with government agencies and



international partners, I represent the interests of the Alliance in order to gain support and convey to all participants the importance of our work. We participate in public forums, discussions, and various meetings where I represent our organization. These are not just speeches, but the protection of the interests of civil society, the opportunity to promote initiatives that help people.

Most of my work is related to the support of our members – there are 78 organizations and this year there were submitted 8 applications more to enter the Alliance which would be considered by the Coordination Council. We hold different events where we discuss their needs, problems, and do everything possible so that each participant feels supported and is confident that his voice will be heard.

We pay special attention to monitoring our projects. These are not just reports – they are an analysis of how our programs affect society and what can be improved. We understand that without constant feedback from our members and partners, we will not be able to be fully useful.

In addition, one of the priorities is to support young organizations and initiative groups that are currently active in such spheres as human rights and environmental initiatives. These areas are the foundation of civil society, because they affect everyone. We initiate projects aimed at developing civil initiatives, helping people to participate more actively in the life of the city through participation in the process of decision-making at the state level.

In fact, my job is to create conditions in which every citizen can influence change, participate in society and be heard. This is the main goal and mission of the Shymkent Civil Alliance.

– Let's discuss the development of civil society in Kazakhstan. How do you assess the level of awareness of Kazakhstanis in this area? To what extent is our society ready to participate in making important decisions for the country?

– Development of civil society is a path that requires time and effort. Today, people's awareness of this area strongly depends on the region, the level of access to information and, of course, interest in public life. In large cities such as Almaty and Astana, civil society is actively developing, largely due to the presence of many NGOs, civil society activists and media platforms. Seminars, trainings, and forums are held here to help people understand how they can influence decision-making processes. Most importantly, people here have more opportunities to hear about successful initiatives and be inspired to participate.

But if we talk about regions and rural areas, the picture, unfortunately, is less optimistic. In small towns, there is often a lack of access to the Internet and information resources that help people learn about the work of civil society. As a result, many do not even fully understand what civil society is and what role it plays. It is necessary to work on availability of information and the organization of events on the ground.

As for the willingness of Kazakhstanis to participate in making important decisions, this is directly related to the level of trust in government



” It is important to form an understanding among young people from an early age that they can participate in democratic processes and be part of decision-making”





agencies. People want to see that their participation can really make a difference. When there is no feedback from the authorities or it is purely formal, interest in participation decreases. But when there are real examples showing that public initiatives bring tangible results, people are ready to get involved and support such initiatives.

Another important point is education. It is important to form an understanding among young people from an early age that they can participate in democratic processes and be part of decision-making. When people have such a base, they begin to see themselves as part of the system and want to influence it.

Of course, there are those who do not see a direct connection between their actions and the result. Such people can be motivated through concrete examples of success – when they see civil initiatives changing lives for the better, especially in their local community.

In general, awareness of civil society is growing, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Joint efforts on the part of both the state and activists are needed to involve more citizens. Only then will we be able to create a society where everyone will

feel their importance and responsibility for the future of the country.

**– What changes in the sector of non-governmental organizations can you note since Kazakhstan gained independence? How, in your opinion, has this sector developed, and what key stages can be identified?**

– Since Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991, the sector of non-governmental organizations has come a long way, and before my eyes, civil society was literally created from scratch. The first steps were related to the creation of legal framework for NGOs. In 2001, the Law “On Non-Profit Organizations” was adopted, which gave organizations the opportunity to work in a legal field and ensured legal stability. This was an important step, because for the first time NGOs received a legal framework for their activities, including the possibility of registration, reporting and working according to clear rules.

This legal framework gave impetus to the creation of new organizations, and their number grew rapidly. We have seen how NGOs have begun

” In addition, international cooperation has always played a key role in the development of our NGOs”

to cover a wide variety of areas: ecology, education, health, human rights, support for vulnerable groups and much more.

In the 2000s, the next important stage took place – the state realized the importance of NGOs as partners in solving social issues. It was then that the system of state social order appeared, and NGOs had the opportunity to participate in the implementation of social programs at the state level. This strengthened the position of NGOs and allowed them to expand their activities, making them full-fledged players in the social sphere. Thanks to this, we were able to solve many important tasks, such as supporting children, protecting women’s rights and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

More recently, in 2024, the Law on Public Control was adopted – and this can be called another milestone in the history of NGOs in Kazakhstan. The law gives our organizations the official right to participate in monitoring government programs, budgets and decisions. This increases the transparency of the work of government agencies, and, it seems to me, opens up new horizons for civil society. Now NGOs have more powers, and they can really influence government processes and ensure their accountability.

In addition, international cooperation has always played a key role in the development of our NGOs. The support of organizations such as USAID, the European Union and UNDP has helped to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and give them access to international experience. This cooperation allows us to share best practices and apply international standards in Kazakhstan.

Of course, challenges remain. One of the main issues is financial stability and independence of NGOs. In recent years, we have seen a tendency to strengthen state control over the activities of NGOs, which raises certain concerns. Independence and freedom of action are fundamental principles for civil society, and their preservation is important for further development.

Despite the challenges, I am optimistic about the future of the sector. With the development of legislation on public control and new opportunities for NGOs to participate in social design, we see that the NGO sector will become even more active and influential. I am convinced that our organizations will continue to play an important role in building a democratic and sustainable society, and their contribution to the development of the country will only grow.

**– How would you assess the current legislation of Kazakhstan in the field of non-governmental organizations? To what extent does it contribute to the development of civil society, and what aspects need to be improved?**

– The legislation regulating the activities of NGOs in Kazakhstan has indeed undergone significant changes in recent years. It creates a framework that allows non-governmental organizations to act within the framework of the law, engage in socially significant projects and even participate in government programs. These are important steps for us, because NGOs play a key role in supporting and developing civil society.

Among the positive changes, I would note that NGOs are free to register, choose their areas and attract funding, including from international sources. The mechanism of the state social order is another important opportunity that allows NGOs to participate in solving social problems. Thanks to this, the support from the state be-



comes tangible and focused on concrete results.

But, of course, difficulties remain. For example, the reporting procedure is often difficult, especially for small organizations. Small NGOs that are just starting their work may face requirements that require special knowledge in the field of accounting and law. This can become a serious barrier to their effective work, because they are forced to divert resources to administrative tasks instead of focusing on their main mission.

– Transparency of the distribution of public financing is another difficult issue. Support in the form of social orders is necessary, but the distribution of these funds often raises questions for NGOs. Lack of clarity and difficulties in accessing finance can create difficulties, especially for organizations that implement socially significant projects.

It is also important to maintain the independence of NGOs. Civil society should be free from pressure from the state and business. In some cases, we see that when NGOs touch on sensitive topics such as human rights or the environment, they are under pressure. Legislation should protect the independence of NGOs, provide them with freedom of action and protect their rights.

The Law on Public Control has recently been adopted, which gives NGOs the right to participate in monitoring government programs and budgets. This is a big step forward, as it allows civil society to more actively influence decision-making. It is important that this law works in practice, and government agencies really meet NGOs halfway, openly and constructively cooperating with them.

In general, our legislation creates a good basis for the work of NGOs, but needs to be improved. Systemic reforms, simplification of procedures and strengthening of independence mechanisms will allow NGOs to be more effective, influential and successful in fulfilling their mission. Civil society will become stronger if it feels that its voice has been heard and that it has a real impact on public life.

**– In your opinion, what changes are needed to improve the current state of the NGO sector?**

#### **What can be done to improve its effectiveness and sustainability in the future?**

– In order for NGOs to truly unleash their potential and become a full-fledged force of civil society, it is necessary to make a number of changes that will make their work more sustainable and influential. Here are a few key areas where changes could bring tangible results.

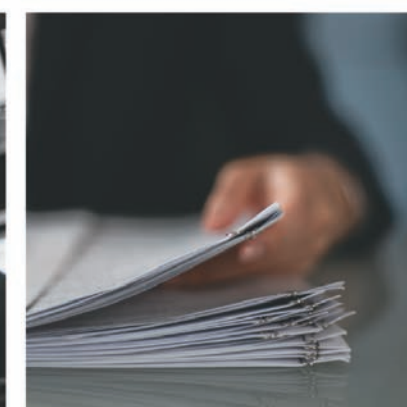
The first is financial stability. Today, many NGOs depend on government grants or the support of international donors, which limits their independence. It is important that the sector develops internal sources of financing: corporate social responsibility, crowdfunding, donations from individuals, as well as social entrepreneurship. This will help NGOs become more flexible and independent.

The state social order also needs to be finalized. We see that this mechanism is often not available for small organizations. Transparent rules for allocation of funding and reduction of bureaucratic barriers are needed so that NGOs at all levels can participate on an equal footing.

Another important task is to increase the level of professionalism. To do this, it is necessary to develop educational programs, trainings on project management, fundraising, legal issues and other areas. The more competent the NGO staff are, the more effective and professional the organizations themselves will become. In addition, the exchange of experience between NGOs through forums, conferences and working groups will help them share best practices and inspire each other.

We also need to cooperate more actively with the state. Creation of long-term partnerships between NGOs and government agencies will help to solve social problems more effectively. However, now such partnerships are often accompanied by bureaucratic barriers, which prevents the broad involvement of organizations in joint projects. Systematic approach is needed so that government agencies perceive NGOs as equal partners.

Public control and monitoring is another area where NGOs can play a more prominent role. The Law on Public Control has already given certain powers, but it is important that organiza-



**” This increases the transparency of the work of government agencies, and, it seems to me, opens up new horizons for civil society. Now NGOs have more powers, and they can really influence government processes and ensure their accountability”**

tions have access to the necessary information and do not feel pressure from government agencies. Expanding the role of NGOs in monitoring government programs will increase transparency and accountability of the government.

We must not forget about the formation of public perception of NGOs. Many citizens still do not fully understand the role of NGOs and do not trust them enough. Information campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the activities of NGOs, as well as development of culture of charity and volunteerism, will help strengthen ties between citizens and organizations.

Technology also plays an important role. The introduction of digital platforms for crowdfunding, online courses and community initiatives will allow NGOs to interact more effectively with a wide audience. Analytical online tools for monitoring government programs will help us to evaluate their results more accurately and promptly.

We also should remember regional NGOs. In the capital and large cities, organizations have

access to resources and support, but in the regions the situation is much more complicated. We must direct more grants and educational programs specifically to the regional level in order to eliminate the imbalance and create conditions for uniform development throughout the country.

In addition, international cooperation remains an important area. Kazakhstani NGOs should integrate more actively into international networks, adopt the experience of foreign colleagues and participate in solving global issues. Support for international management and reporting standards will also help to increase the confidence of donors and partners in NGOs.

If these changes are implemented, Kazakhstani NGOs will be able to become even stronger and more effective participants in civil society. As a result, this will lead to the creation of conditions for more equitable and sustainable social development in our country.

Gulmira Ileuova:

# Public opinion survey helps to improve the quality and efficiency of government

*In 2001, the Public Foundation “Center for Social and Political Studies “Strategy” was established in Kazakhstan. For more than 20 years it has been headed by Gulmira Ileuova, a well-known sociologist in our country, candidate of sociological sciences.*

– Gulmira Tokshalykovna, please, can you tell us about the features of your non-governmental organization and its most significant achievements over the years?

– The main task of our foundation has always been to conduct research on issues of social and political development of society. Even my dissertation was dedicated to “Social aspects of formation of the political elite of Kazakhstan” – refers to political sociology.

We are a research organization, and this is very different from other NGOs that provide social services or are aimed at solving the problems of any social groups. We are not engaged in human rights and educational activities, but only research and sometimes consulting on their results. Of course, if any help is needed, we try to provide it, but we do not have such specialists.

We have already conducted a lot of research, we have many different customers, including government agencies, the quasi-public sector, and international organizations. By participating in the state social order, for example, we help the state to improve the quality and efficiency of management



of a particular industry or the state as a whole.

And most importantly, we always listen to a potential client. After all, they rarely come to us knowing exactly what they want. As a rule, the customer plans to study something, roughly understands the object, his budget. And we tailor our research for almost every customer. This is why our organization is unique, because few people do so. Most often, the work is put on stream, the same tools are used, and, accordingly, a high-quality result is not always achieved.

– What about the competitors?

– We don’t have many of them, but we do. Some NGOs have made research a side focus of their activities. In the regions, I try not to compete with anyone, there are so few orders there, and if there is a sociologist and experience in conducting social research, then they can do them themselves.

As for the national level, yes, there are those who win orders from us during tenders. Although it would seem that there is an unspoken rule to outsource research, many ministries and departments have acquired subsidiaries that deal with the sociology they need. And I think this is completely wrong, because there is a risk of summarizing the research results for those that are beneficial to the customer. In this case, outsourcing is needed, which should be handled by independent structures.

– It is clear that sociology is an extensive science, its works can be used in all spheres of life. But how important is honest and professional sociological research in general?

– The very need for research should stem from the situation in a particular segment of society. If there is a problem, that’s where the edge of research interest should be directed.

For example, if we take a problem such as unemployment, the relevant ministry not only relies on data from the Bureau of National Statistics, but also conducts additional research to identify, for example, differences in the labor market by region. The Ministry of Health conducted relevant studies before the introduction of CSHI. It is not necessary that their results will be publicly announced. But thanks to them, departments proactively resolve some issues within the framework of their state policies. And the same in all directions. It is not for nothing that many structures in our country have huge research budgets.

On the other hand, there is our personal research interest. For example, we believe that there are problems in this area, and we place an order for ourselves. Thus, every year, or even twice a year, our foundation conducts a study of the social well-being of the population of Kazakhstan and

*We are not engaged in human rights and educational activities, but only research and sometimes consulting on their results*

publicly puts its results on display. Perhaps even someone examine them, compares them and draws some conclusions.

For three years in a row, we have been doing projects for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation – on secularism and atheism, on the elections of local mayors and on the environmental practices of rural residents. They are also publicly available. But we have no right to disclose research ordered by the state: we conducted research, transferred the results and forgot them.

– Let’s talk about the methods that are in the arsenal of modern sociologists? Where does a particular study begin?

– In fact, the Strategy Foundation consists of 4-5 people in Almaty and Astana. So we sit down and first discuss the order: which target groups we will use, which method – questionnaire, survey, interview, focus group discussions, what are our deadlines and budget. These are almost always several methods and target groups.

For example, we are currently working on the project “Assessment of the involvement of the parent community in the organization of hot meals in rural primary schools” for the Center for Support of Civic Initiatives. We conducted a similar study in Kyrgyzstan, and I am interested in how things are going in Kazakhstan.

We have chosen four regions, and we already see that in cities this control is one way or another carried out, but in villages, especially remote ones, it is unlikely that any control is carried out. As a result, we will give our recommendations, the ultimate





goal is to improve the quality of meal for school-children. After all, Kazakhstan has entered into this expensive project – to feed primary school students at public expense, while not working very well on the food supervision system. In terms of time, this project will last three months, some projects will last months, sometimes up to six months.

**– Does it happen that the results obtained surprise you, for example, they assumed one thing, but another came out?**

– In 2020-2021, at the request of the UNDP, we studied domestic violence in the Turkestan region. I assumed that everything was bad with this, but I did not expect it to be as bad as this. Recent events confirm that the situation is only getting worse.

Then, at the initiative of the Prosecutor General's Office, social and psychological support services were created in the regions. We hoped that women who are being abused would be able to go at least there, because going to the local police or even to their parents is not an option for many.

I remember how horrified I was by the immorality, duplicity, and hypocrisy that was going on there. Our research was then noticed at the government. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev spoke about it, mentioning my last name. He instructed that the cases of women and children who were subjected to violence should be handled by female investigators. Unfortunately, as far as I know, the execution of this assignment is far from perfect, due to the lack of personnel.

**– This year your book “From the Arena to the Square”: living the Almaty tragedy”, dedicated to Kantar was published. Can you tell us how it was created.**

– I want to say that our work is in great demand in Kazakhstan. But its results are not always given due attention. In 2021, by order of the Science Committee, we conducted a large political study to assess the protest potential. Then we said something bad was coming. The data were the most negative for all the years of observation, the level of dissatisfaction

with life, protest moods were very high.

When the tragic events in Almaty happened, we immediately decided that we would conduct a witness interview. Since February, we have been looking for people who were involved in these events in some way. We collected 60 interviews, divided the narrative into three days and built it on the stories of individual subjects. This is a very important project for me, personally I am very pleased with this book, it is unusual, but this format is not suitable for everyone. We are not going to republish it, we will retain it as a rarity.

**– Does something change in your work over time, or is everything stable enough?**

– Since 2009, we have been preparing a quarterly rating of the influence of politicians – a very popular document, I must say. By the way, having a sufficient database collected over two decades, we can conduct some kind of monitoring, whereas young competitors are not very engaged in data preservation, and their research is extremely boring. Seeing some changes in our numbers, we can explain what this means.

Thus, according to the rating of politicians, the assessment was previously carried out on three points – credibility, effectiveness as a manager and prospects as a politician. Those who had a high authority score were at the top of the ranking. Now we have changed the perspective to publicity. Authority as an evaluation parameter is also less important, but effectiveness as a manager is becoming extremely important. In modern realities, if a person from the elite is closed, he immediately loses points, and his ratings decrease. Publicity is becoming the most important aspect of image and reputation.

Of course, the means also change. Questionnaires are no longer on paper, but on tablets. We take interviews online, it is not necessary to meet in person. Nevertheless, we are still actively traveling, although we also use zoom and Skype. Even voice recorders have become much more convenient!

We are not changing our approaches yet. If this is a population survey, then there may be random and quota samples. In the latter case, the specialist calculates quotas, the interviewers follow the route

***If there is a problem, that's where the edge of research interest should be directed.***

and interview, for example, a citizen suitable for the specified parameters in the required succession of apartment. This is not a survey near the store, of your friends, but an apartment-by-apartment quota survey – every fifth apartment in the city, every third house in the village. Yes, people are reluctant to open doors, to hold a person's attention and interview them in detail is a difficult job. But there is no other way yet.

As a result of the research, we not only describe the figures, but also analyze them. There is still qualitative research when we work with texts. Thus, for a focus group discussion, people who don't know each other gather, I have to get them to talk, win them over, and sometimes ask difficult and unpleasant questions. The conversation lasts about two hours, then the recording is transcribed and analyzed. This is done, for example, to identify what unites or distinguishes people from certain regions, social groups or organizations.

We do not practice telephone polling, although other organizations do. Firstly, we can't ask too much over the phone, and our questionnaires sometimes consist of 30-40 questions. Secondly, people are not even answering their phone to-day – they are afraid of fraud. In Russia, there was evidence that out of a hundred calls, at best 15 would be answered, and not the fact that until the very end. In Kazakhstan, too, they will probably have to terminate telephone surveys. I would like to urge our citizens not to abandon opinion polls, they are very necessary for the further development of society.

Dinara Utebayeva:

# Our mission is to create a space where everyone can contribute, be heard and find support



**Dinara Utebayeva, head of Kostanay NGO Resource Center and PF "Civil Alliance of Kostanay region "GrIn", told Adal Azamat magazine about the mission and tasks of the civil sector, its achievements and challenges. In an interview, she shared her vision of how effective government support and active citizen participation can make NGOs a pillar for social development of the region and the country.**

– Dinara Kairbekovna, you have been doing public work in Kostanay region for many years, you are a member of the Commission on Social Issues and Interaction with NGOs, you are head of PF "Civil Alliance of Kostanay region "GrIn". Can you tell us about the key areas of your activity. What is your main mission?

I have been in charge of the Civil Alliance of Kostanay region for 10 years. Our work is, first of all, to support those who are not indifferent to the problems of society, who are ready to invest their energy and heart in the development of our region.

We are a regional resource center for NGOs and work in close contact with the Department of Public Development of the Akimat of Kostanay region.

The main mission of our team is development of the civil sector, creating opportunities for growth, support and interaction through training at the NGO School, training trainers and experts, creating conditions for expanding the field of activity.

We also conduct many training programs for NGOs together with the NGO Academy with the support of our partners of the Initiative Development Center of Almaty.

I am always happy to see how representatives of non-profit organizations grow professionally, gaining confidence in their abilities and in what they do. These meetings and trainings allow us to share knowledge, inspire each other and find solutions to complex problems.

One of our important areas is public control and monitoring. We strive not only to identify and improve the quality of public services, but also to maintain an atmosphere of trust and transparency in society. I sincerely believe that an open dialogue between the state and citizens is foundation for successful development of the region, where everyone feels their involvement and importance.

Volunteering support is another area that is especially dear to me. In recent years, the volunteer movement in our area has not only expanded – it has become a powerful example of what caring for others means. Our volunteers provide assistance to those in need, whether they are socially vulnerable groups or those who find themselves in difficult situations. These people make the world around us a better place, and our task is to support them in this.

As a border region, we pay great attention to international partnership. We work closely with NGOs in Kurgan, Omsk, Chelyabinsk regions and other regions of Russia, as well as Central Asian countries. Such interaction enriches us with experience, gives us the opportunity to share best practices and jointly solve important social issues. In each project, we not only solve urgent tasks, but also find like-minded people and friends on the other side of the border.

My main mission, as I see it, is to create a space where everyone can contribute to the common good, where everyone can be heard and find support.

– 20 years ago, the non-governmental sector developed mainly due to foreign grants. Today, the state is more interested in and supports the work of public organizations. There is a mechanism of state social order, grants are allocated. In this regard, what positive changes do you see in the activities of the third sector?

– Of course, there have been significant positive changes in recent years. Previously, non-governmental organizations were indeed largely dependent on foreign grants and funding, which, on the one hand, allowed us to learn and adopt international experience, but on the other hand, sometimes limited our ability to influence local processes.

Today, thanks to the support of the state, the third sector has managed to become more independent and sustainable, and this, in turn, provides much more opportunities for development.

The mechanism of state support in the form of state social order and grants opens up new prospects. Now NGOs can participate more actively in solving social problems that are really important for our society. These programs allow us to address specific issues at the local level, and thanks to this, our projects become more targeted, effective and understandable for people.

The annual increase in government funds also indicates that NGOs are becoming recognized partners in social development issues, and this strengthens trust and respect for their work.

In addition, government support provides access to resources that were previously unavailable. We can hold more events, training programs, and work with the public on important issues such as education, healthcare, and social support. These resources help us to professionalize, become stronger and more confident in solving the tasks we face.

However, I can note that the mechanism for financing state social orders and grants is not yet perfect, and there are real problems in this direction. But we, together with the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, constantly strive to identify these problems and look for ways to solve them. We regularly hold discussions and analyze existing difficulties in order to make the process of financing and interaction

**IF SOCIETY UNDERSTANDS AND SEES THE RESULTS OF OUR WORK, THIS WILL BECOME THE BASIS FOR BUILDING SUSTAINABLE TRUST IN THE THIRD SECTOR**





**IF EVERY PERSON IN AN ORGANIZATION IS SINCERELY PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR WORK, IF THEY SEE VALUE IN THEIR WORK, THEN SUCH AN NGO WILL NOT JUST EXIST, BUT LIVE, GROW AND INSPIRE OTHERS**

with NGOs more flexible and understandable for all parties. This helps to improve our programs and ensures that they are more in line with the needs of society.

What is especially important is that interaction with the state allows us to build a dialogue with the authorities, and not just as executors of certain projects, but as equal participants in the process. Today, civil society organizations can participate in the discussion and development of regulations, make proposals and find joint solutions. This is a huge step forward, because previously such co-operation was rather an exception.

I am particularly pleased that in recent years more and more young people have come to the non-governmental sector who are inspired by the opportunity to really influence what is happening around them. They see that NGOs are not just a job, but a mission and an opportunity to be useful. Such

support from the state gives us confidence in the future and feeling that our efforts are in demand, which means that we are moving in the right direction.

**– How many NGOs are working in Kostanay region and in what areas? How do you assess the effectiveness of their activities and the quality of project implementation? Have the requirements of customers in relation to NGOs changed?**

– To date, more than a thousand non-governmental organizations have been registered in Kostanay region, many of them work in a wide range of areas, solving important social tasks and improving the lives of residents of our region.

In fact, Kostanay NGOs are doing tremendous work in the field of support for socially vulnerable groups, health protection, human rights protection,

volunteerism development, sports, culture and other areas.

For example, organizations such as NGO Umit-Nadezhda, which supports citizens with musculoskeletal disorders, are actively working in the social sphere. This organization initiated the inclusion of wheelchair dancing in the register of the Paralympic Games. NGO parents of children with disabilities “Stop autism” helps more than 200 children with special needs to socialize in society. The Society of Mothers of Children with Disabilities “Raduga” has ensured that citizens with disabilities of the 1st group receive benefits even after reaching the age of 18.

Social entrepreneurship is also developing in Kostanay region. For example, the Rudnenskoy Voluntary Society for the Disabled and PF Perekrestok are successful examples of how business and social mission can be combined. These organizations help people with disabilities to find themselves in society, realize their abilities and provide themselves with work.

Significant work is also being carried out in the field of resocialization of convicts. PF “Zhanashyrbol” is actively engaged in this problem, helping convicts to return to a full life in society.

In the field of active longevity, PF Synergy Scientific and Educational Center also stands out, which organizes programs for the older generation, supporting their physical and emotional health. NGO “Birlik” promotes the strengthening of interethnic relations in Zhitikarinsky district, which is especially important for a multinational region like ours.

There are also examples of fruitful activities in healthcare. The NGO “Path of Health 1” is engaged in important projects for prevention of tuberculosis, HIV AIDS, and NGO “Association of Hemophilia Patients “Tumar” provides support to patients and helps them receive high-quality medical care. These organizations not only help patients, but also carry out information and educational work to prevent and recognize health problems in time.

The field of volunteering in Kostanay region is represented by such public organizations as “DamUkst”, “Prometheus”, “Do good”, “Halkyma komek”, as well as volunteer rescue teams “Region 10”, “Bars” and “Dos”. These teams provide irreplaceable assistance in emergency situations, help those

who are in trouble, and attract more and more active and caring people to volunteer.

In my opinion, the efficiency and quality of NGO project implementation have increased markedly. These and many other organizations show a high level of professionalism and a sincere desire to change society for the better.

The state and sponsors have really become more demanding: today it is important not only to complete projects, but also to achieve measurable results. This has led to an increase in professionalism, because NGOs understand that their work must bring real and tangible results.

We support such changes and try to help our NGOs become stronger and more professional.

**– Representatives of the third sector still face certain difficulties. This includes untimely financing of social projects, their short-term nature, distrust of the population, etc. Perhaps the NGOs of Kostanay region have their own specific difficulties. What kind of solution to these problems do you see? Is it necessary to amend legislation to improve the situation in this area?**

– Yes, the difficulties faced by the third sector do exist.

Government funding, especially grants, is characterized by untimeliness. Project funds are often received with a delay, and since NGOs do not have reserve sources of funding, this can create serious difficulties for the timely implementation of projects. The short-term nature of most grants is also a challenge, since solving social problems requires long-term, systemic efforts, and projects designed for a short period do not always allow achieving sustainable results.

In addition, as you correctly noted, the population sometimes shows distrust of NGOs, which may be due to a lack of information about our work and results.

In Kostanay region, there is a decrease in activity of previously operating NGOs, especially in rural areas, which makes it difficult to develop initiatives on the ground. There is also a need for closer support with local authorities to solve local problems.

In my opinion, several approaches can be considered to improve the situation. First, the financing

process should be optimized so that funds reach NGOs on time, and not in the middle or end of the year, as sometimes happens. My colleagues and representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture and I have already discussed the need for this improvement, and we hope that there will be changes in the near future.

Secondly, it is necessary to pay more attention to supporting long-term projects. If NGOs have the opportunity to plan their work for a longer period, they will be able not only to effectively solve current tasks, but also to build a strategy to achieve sustainable results. This is especially important in the field of social support, education, healthcare and other areas that require a systematic approach.

From the point of view of legislation, the introduction of additional benefits and support measures for NGOs working in socially significant areas could be considered. It may also be useful to review incentive mechanisms for NGOs that effectively solve social problems and achieve high results.

In addition, I think it is important to conduct more information campaigns and events aimed at increasing public confidence in NGOs. We try to be transparent in our activities, provide reports, organize meetings with citizens, and such openness helps to gain trust and shows that our work is aimed at the benefit of society. If society understands and sees the results of our work, this will become the basis for building sustainable trust in the third sector.

Of course, this is a complex process, and it cannot be solved with a single change. All of us, NGOs, government agencies, and society as a whole, must work together to overcome the difficulties faced by the third sector.

**– According to the latest data, there are over 20 thousand NGOs in Kazakhstan. This is a fairly modest figure. How do you feel about competition in the NGO sector? Do we have it? Or are we still far from reaching the scale of foreign non-governmental organizations?**

– Competition in the NGO sector, in my opinion, is extremely important, but only if it remains healthy. It helps us strive for high standards, develop, find new ways to solve problems and, most importantly,

improve people's lives. Healthy competition is what moves us forward, allows us to share experiences, be inspired by the successes of colleagues, and therefore make society a better place together.

But, unfortunately, we also see negative examples. Sometimes so-called pseudo-NGOs come to our sector, which, in fact, do not seek to solve social problems, but simply take small grants, “gain experience”, and then compete with really dedicated organizations, those who sincerely care about the people they help and put their soul into their work. This is a difficult situation, and, of course, it is important to deal with it. We have already taken the first steps by amending legislation to reduce the impact of such factors. It has produced results somewhere, but there is still a lot of work ahead.

It is also important for NGOs themselves to constantly develop and improve their professionalism. After all, the trust and respect of society are won over years of responsible and high-quality work, and we, as a sector, must strive for this.

As for the number of NGOs, I think that numbers are not the most important thing. We do not need to chase after quantity, it is important that every organization has high-quality, sincere work behind it. Let there be fewer of them, but they will be those who are really ready to change the world for the better, who hears and understands people's needs, helps sincerely and with a soul.

**– You conduct training for NGO staff, often travel to remote areas, and draw attention to the problems of rural areas. How active are NGOs in rural areas and how can their development be stimulated? In your opinion, do we need strong public organizations in rural areas and why is this important for the state and society?**

– Working with rural areas is really very important for us. We regularly conduct training for NGO staff, travel to remote areas, trying to support local initiatives and help solve the pressing problems of rural residents. However, NGO activity in rural areas is still lower than in urban areas, which is associated with a number of objective difficulties.

Rural NGOs face a lack of facilities to operate, stable funding, and sometimes a lack of understanding and interaction with local executive bo-

dies. These problems seriously limit their opportunities for growth and effective work.

Moreover, representatives of rural NGOs are not always able to come to the regional center for consultations or training, so we regularly organize field visits to provide support directly where necessary. But even these efforts are not enough yet. In order for the situation to improve, it is important to develop a network of rural resource centers that could provide access to knowledge, advice and assistance directly in settlements.

I am sure that strong non-government organizations in rural areas are extremely important for both society and the state. Rural area has its own unique problems and needs that require special attention. NGOs on the ground have a better understanding of these features and are able to act more quickly, support rural communities and address specific issues at a level close to the population. This gives people the opportunity to feel that they are not alone, that their problems are important and can be solved.

To stimulate rural NGOs, in my opinion, it is important to create sustainable financial support, taking into account the specifics of rural conditions. Grant and social order programs should be adapted to the needs of rural NGOs so that they can confidently plan their work and achieve results. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with local executive bodies so that NGOs and government agencies can work in partnership to solve common problems.

**– What do you think determines the success and sustainability of non-government organization?**

– The success and sustainability of non-government organization, in my opinion, is based primarily on people – their sincerity, dedication and faith in what they do. Without this, even the most thoughtful projects and the largest budgets will not be able to bring true benefits. If every person in an organization is sincerely passionate about their work, if they see value in their work, then such an NGO will not just exist, but live, grow and inspire others.

Of course, professional qualities are also important: the ability to plan correctly, manage resources effectively, analyze and draw conclusions. But the

**WE STRIVE NOT ONLY TO IDENTIFY AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES, BUT ALSO TO MAINTAIN AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY IN SOCIETY**

really strong organizations, those that are able to withstand any difficulties, those who build their work on trust, honesty and desire to help.

Important component is the support from the community for which we work. After all, NGOs are created for the sake of people, and when people see the results of their work, when they know that they can rely on the organization and ask for help, this creates the basis for sustainability. Feedback, trust and support from those you help make any NGO stronger.

Partnerships and interaction with government agencies, other NGOs and businesses are equally important. Much more can be achieved together. When there are reliable partners nearby, it gives confidence and stability in the long term, allows implementing large and significant projects.

But perhaps the most important thing is a clear understanding of its mission, for which the organization exists. When each employee knows why he came, what goal he wants to achieve, when it comes from the heart, the organization becomes truly strong. It is precisely such organizations that remain resilient, even when times, conditions, or circumstances change. They withstand any challenges because they act not for the sake of profit, but for the sake of common goal and the desire to change the world for the better.



Dmitriy Poltarenko:

# Taking care of your future is the right civic position

***The civil sector is the most developed in the Karaganda region. There are a large number of strong NGOs, civil society activists, and local self-government is vividly represented. Dmitriy Poltarenko, who has been engaged in public activities for more than 15 years and now heads the ALE "Civil Alliance of the Karaganda region", has made a significant contribution to this.***

– Dmitriy Sergeyevich, how do you assess the development of civic engagement in your region? What problems would you like to mention?

– NGOs in our region support almost all spheres of the state's life, participate in the implementation of state policy, covering all segments of the population, from youth to veterans. I cannot say that we all exist as a single whole, a single fist, we are only going towards this. But there is interaction and exchange of experience, as there is, in my opinion, a certain high-quality competition.

Our region holds one of the leading positions in the republic in terms of interaction of NGOs with each other and with executive bodies. However, there has been a tendency in society lately to sequestering, they say, this is yours, and this is mine. For example, an educational institution tells an NGO that it does not need the educational programs it offers. I don't know where it started from, but this is one of the main dangers in building statehood. Such problems associated with a misunderstanding of the role of some organizations need to be eliminated.



Horizontal partnership relations should be built, because everyone has a common task – building a bright future for us and our children. Taking care of our future is the right civic position, but we must not think of ourselves alone and irreducible, but of ourselves as a part of society. Our Alliance works from this position.

– You mentioned competition, can you tell us more about the third sector of the region?



” Local history lessons in the classroom are good. But it is difficult to describe the smell of the steppe in words, and having inhaled it, it is impossible not to fall in love with it”

– I would like to note that cooperation and collaboration, not competition, should still be fundamental in the field of NGOs. Civil Alliance of the region includes 38 organizations, plus there are many organizations with which we cooperate in one way or another. In general, I can name about a hundred active non-profit organizations in the region. But this does not mean that all of them implement the state social order or work in the field of public procurement. There are self-sufficient organizations that exist through sponsorship or a volunteer approach.

Competition for profit is, of course, not about NGOs. But we must understand at the same time that the civil sector cannot work without money. Professionalism means paying for work. If we want to develop the professional sector of NGOs, we must consider certain financial opportunities for its maintenance.

I think that a lot has been done in Kazakhstan for this, but more can be done. Everything that concerns society should

be financed from the state budget. Certain collaboration of volunteer and non-governmental organizations is good. But if we are aiming at a professional approach, then a person should receive compensation for his contribution – labor, creative, intellectual...

At the same time, a balance is important in the understanding of the NGO workers themselves – our work should be paid, but they do not come to NGOs to become millionaires. An NGO worker is a vocation, a state of mind. We solve many issues, and there is no clear distinction between the head or, for example, the freight handler, when necessary, we are ready to do everything to achieve a common goal.

– How effective is the system of state social order in this regard, in your opinion?

– In Kazakhstan, budgetary funds are allocated for social problems, and this is already good. Not everything works

**” But if we are aiming at a professional approach, then a person should receive compensation for his contribution – labor, creative, intellectual...”**

smoothly, it's a long way. Any good laws are ineffective if they are poorly enforced.

When a government official sees himself as a head or a local prince, there will be no normal work, no matter how much money is allocated through this state agency for implementation of state programs. At the same time, I repeat, the state is making serious efforts to ensure that the civil sector has the opportunity to develop professionally, to provide certain services that are paid for from the state budget.

However, often for some projects, neither experience, nor knowledge and skills, nor even copyright do not matter if the alternative price is lower. For example, while in our republic “Houses of Friendship” will implement projects through the public procurement portal using the method of requesting electronic price offers and method of “open tender”, and not through the SSO method (state social order), shell IE will appear who will take lots, considering them simply as an opportunity to earn money. These IEs will not be interested, in fact, in global goals and objectives, but only in the opportunity to earn money here and now.

Unfortunately, some NGOs have also become so commercialized that they travel all over the republic and, sorry for the figure of speech, try to “make dough”, preventing people who devote their hearts to this cause from working. All these are certain distortions, but in general, the state social order

works well. The mess begins as soon as the lots are released through methods that do not correlate with the very essence of the state social order.

But I will also note another positive point: now NGOs can pay only one MCI to participate in the state social order. This is already a big step forward for NGO representatives after we discussed it with the leadership of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs. However, this applies only to the State Social Order method and here... we return to the problem of publishing lots by requesting electronic price offers and using the “open tender” method.

I will repeat: if we intend to promote the social sphere and do not want to turn it into a sandboxing, then it should be done by professionals who are ready to spend all their working time on implementation of social projects. We are talking about projects that are not of interest to commercial structures, and the state cannot implement them, because this is not part of its state functions. For example, organizing events for disabled people, interacting with representatives of religious movements, studying the aspirations of a particular stratum of society, and much more.

**– Being a member of the Public Council of the Karaganda region, what can you say about the role of this institution in the development of civil society?**

– The Public Council is an advisory body that should set itself the task of hearing the population and interacting with government agencies to address their requests. The Public Council of the Karaganda region performs this function. It consists of active people of influence, civil society activists, and representatives of the mass media. Within its premises, we exchange opinions, learn, and raise our level to solve problems together. In this context, the Public Council plays the role of a consolidating body for representatives of civil society.

At the initiative of our PC, changes were made, including to the budget programs of

the region, we monitor the work of our heat and energy supply organizations, held hearings on construction of nuclear power plants at which we were able to organize a good dialogue, not mutual accusations.

**– You started your career as a public figure with the publication of a youth magazine. Are you continuing this activity?**

– The monthly periodical Vector Inform, in which I have been the editor-in-chief since 2007, has been published to this day. However, it has already grown beyond the youth and today informs the population of the region about the initiatives of government agencies and state programs, raises the problems of society, gives recommendations on their solution.

In fact, I have a lot to be proud of. For example, we once created the first youth support resource center, where we provided financial, organizational, and material support in implementation of youth initiatives for which funds was not provided in the budget. As a result, we all witnessed how Youth Resource Centers appeared in every region of Kazakhstan.

I really love our project “Eriktilermen saihat”, when we take children from residential care facilities, disadvantaged families not only in the Karaganda region, but also in the regions of our country, to Astana, to the Ulytau region. We often talk about patriotism, but sometimes we don't understand where it starts. The good old song “Where the Motherland begins” is still relevant today.

Local history lessons in the classroom are good. But it is difficult to describe the smell of the steppe in words, and having inhaled it, it is impossible not to fall in love with it. Having seen Kazakhstan with your own eyes, you can't help but love it. This project gives the children the opportunity to see, touch, smell our land, and then, I'm sure, they will definitely love it.

**– Significant part of your life is connected with religious and ethno-cultural associations. I know that you are a professional mediator, as well as the head of ECA. Can you tell us what you do in this field.**

– The public association “Citizens of Kazakhstan” has been implementing the project “Club of Religious Associations of the Karaganda region” since 2021, and I am the moderator of this club. This is the very dialogue space that allows us to understand that, despite the fact that we are different, we have a lot in common – the coat of arms, the flag, the anthem, our shanyrak. The laws of our country give us the opportunity to be equal with our differences. We are so closely intertwined that we need to hold on to each other. We want to promote this idea and bring it to the masses. I am also the chairman of PF Russian Ethnocultural Center “Accordance”.

Interfaith and interethnic harmony, mediation procedure and public order are what we need to develop. The activities of ethno-cultural and religious associations in maintaining public safety are very important. It is necessary to understand your role as a part of the state, regardless of your ethnic, linguistic, or religious affiliation. I also think we need to stick to the concept of “Kazakhstani”.

In general, I am glad that there are people who are interested in all this as much as I am, who treat it with professional understanding. I see people around the Civil Alliance who don't expect anything in return, but just want to do some things together. We find contact with government agencies, promote certain projects. I'm glad that I can compensate these people's time financially. This togetherness is there, and that's good. The main thing is to remember that we are a united society, and our future and the future of our children depend on how well we want to live and are ready to work for this.



Nurgul Ulzhekova

# On how to build a world of equal opportunities and how a public organization changes lives



***World of Equal Opportunities Public Foundation has been actively working for many years to create a full-fledged inclusive space in Kazakhstan, where children and youth with disabilities can reach their potential and integrate into society through sports and creativity. We talked with Nurgul Ulzhekova, director of the NGO, about how adaptive sports are developing in our country and why.***

– Nurgul Tulenovna, what goal did you set for yourself initially when you created the World of Equal Opportunities Foundation and what is its mission?

– The mission is to create an inclusive environment where children and youth with special needs can develop their abilities through sports. Our goal was to give them the opportunity to realize their potential and integrate into society, to help raise an independent personality through sports and creative development. From the very moment of its foundation to the present day, we have kept this focus, as years of work in

this direction indicate that we are on the right track.

To achieve this goal, we have developed the Salamatty Bolashak social project, which was supported by sponsors and social partners represented by local executive bodies, commercial organizations and non-governmental organizations.

– How many children does the foundation currently work with? What sports sections do you have? What services are the most in demand among families with special children?

– Today, more than 1,000 children with various forms of disability in 23 cities of Kazakhstan are engaged in adaptive sports sections, creative circles, and their results please us every year. As part of the social project, we have the following sports: adaptive karate, adaptive taekwondo, adaptive swimming, adaptive judo, adaptive athletics, inclusive choreography, adaptive pionerball, boccia, goalball, adaptive football, CP football. But the sections of adaptive swimming, boccia, and inclusive choreography are most in demand among children.

– How much interest does society show in adaptive sports?

– When people with disabilities start thinking about starting to lead an active lifestyle, adaptive sports come to their aid. There is always an interest in adaptive sports, because for any person or child it is not just a pastime, but also going beyond four walls, a way to expand the circle of communication, a chance to learn something new and even be realized. For many children and adults, sport has become a profession, and thanks to it, people with disabilities have the opportunity to earn money.

Unfortunately, we are still facing issues of awareness and social prejudices of society itself. Support for development of adaptive sports from such large organizations as the Sport Qory Foundation for the Support and Development of Tourism and Sports, ERG Komek CF, Samruk-Kazyna Trust CF have made a huge contribution to the promotion of Kazakhstani para-athletics. For example, with the support of the Samruk-Kazyna Trust CF, a social project is being implemented in Kazakhstan to involve children and youth in year-round free training and competitions “Salamatty Bolashak”. This project has become a springboard for special children into both big sports and regular sections, where they, along with their healthy peers, began to play sports. In the process of its implementation in some regions, we often encountered a lack of understanding of the need to develop special children in sports. In such cases, we turned for help to local active NGOs, to the branches of the Amanat party, since our project correlates with the party project “Kedergisiz Keleshek” (Future without barriers). Thus, the financial resources of the sponsors and the administrative support of the social partners helped us to cover geographically a large part of Kazakhstan.



– Do you think there is a need for changes in legislation affecting the development of mass sports among people with disabilities?

– In order to further develop an effective system of involving children and adults with disabilities in sports, it is necessary to amend legislation not only in the field of sports and physical education, but also in the field of education and social protection. These measures should include not only mechanisms to ensure the accessibility of sports facilities for people with disabilities, but also, starting from kindergartens to schools, to school palaces, provide APE (adaptive physical education) groups or introduce inclusive approaches to physical education.

Also, for several years now, we have been trying to achieve changes in the order of the Minister of Sports on the state children’s sports procurements, so that there would be a preferential queue for children with disabilities when issuing vouchers. Unfortunately, our proposal was rejected at the stage of approval by the Ministry of Finance, but for some reason the state made a preferential wait list for children with deviant behavior. That is, “difficult” children, in the opinion of the state, need physical education more than “special” children. But we will try to bring our proposal to the deputies again.





**“The mission is to create an inclusive environment where children and youth with special needs can develop their abilities through sports”**

– Lately, the Minister of Education announced that our universities will begin to train teaching assistants due to the fact that the number of children with special educational needs is increasing. In your interviews, you said that we do not have specialists in adaptive physical education who could work with special children. Has anything changed today?

– The training of teaching assistants partially solves the problem of inclusive education in secondary schools. But, unfortunately, their presence in school does not contribute in any way to the involvement of “special” child in physical education lessons. Physical education teachers and sports coaches need to improve their knowledge in the field of adaptive physical education and, if a child with a disability comes to them for classes, set a goal not to get rid of him/her, but to find approaches and methods to include him/her in the process of physical education.

The law on education stipulates that in educational institutions “Students and pupils with disabilities (with persistent deviations in physical or mental health) are engaged in groups of adaptive physical education and sports or in a general group using methods and means of adaptive physical education and sports.” Unfortunately,

so far there are no APE groups in any school in Kazakhstan, and there are practically no “special” children in the general physical education group.

In Kazakhstan, training has begun in the specialization “Teacher of physical education, adaptive physical education” at the Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism. This academic year will be the first graduation of such specialists. I really hope that these specialists will not avoid working with special students in their future work at school. In the capital’s Academy of Mass Sports and Physical Education, 3rd year students study adaptive physical education. The process is underway. But it’s too early to talk about the results.

– Can an ordinary sports coach work with children with disabilities?

– In fact, if desired, any coach or physical education teacher can adapt the training process to the development disorders of the child. It just requires more energy, patience, creativity and time from a specialist.

Systematic refresher courses are needed for physical education teachers and trainers. For example, in Russia, in addition to training in adaptive physical education and sports, advanced

training courses in this area are held annually for physical education teachers and university teachers. Our people also need to learn from this experience.

– Can we say that adaptive sports are available for children in Kazakhstan? Do you have statistics on how many children with disabilities need adaptive physical education in total?

– Although adaptive sports are becoming more accessible in Kazakhstan, there are still many barriers. According to the Ministry of Sports, out of 705 thousand people with disabilities, only 51,325 thousand are systematically engaged in physical education and sports. This is only about 5% of the total population with disabilities. Unfortunately, there are no official statistics on how many of them are children. But in our project “Salamatty Bolashak” we conducted our research and survey among parents of children with special educational needs and to date, out of thousands of parents we interviewed in 23 cities, it was revealed that their children had never engaged in sports before the project, since everywhere they were denied admission to sports clubs from due to diagnosis. To date, 750 more children with disabilities are included in the wait list to participate in our project in different sections, which, unfortunately, we cannot cover due to limited resources for coaches, sports grounds and financial resources.

– How do you see the future of mass sports for people with disabilities in Kazakhstan, and what measures can contribute to its development?

– The future of mass sports for people with disabilities looks promising, but this requires comprehensive support from the state and the private sector. I believe that increased awareness and cooperation can significantly improve this situation. Today, I see the most effective solution for the development of mass sports among children with disabilities as the decision to allocate a separate queue for children with disabilities under the state sports procurements and provide fulfillment of obligations of schools and other educational organizations to include children with disabilities in the process of physical education through physical educa-

tion lessons and sports sections in performance indicators.

For adults with disabilities, I see an effective solution to create not only an accessible environment at sports facilities, but also the creation of adaptive sports services at these facilities.

In sports, too, it’s time to move away from segregation, that people with disabilities should practice separately. It is high time to create inclusive sports programs in sports facilities, not just in education.

It is necessary to make adaptive sports attractive for private fitness structures as well. There may be some kind of subsidies from the state or tax incentives for fitness centers that are visited by people with disabilities.

– Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in development of inclusive society. They raise issues of the rights of people with disabilities and help create the necessary conditions for their integration.

– By uniting, we are an NGO force, our voice is louder. Being just a mom of a special child, without the creation of the World of Equal Opportunities Public Foundation, I would not have been able to reach either sponsors or the state.

– You are the head of Kazakhstan Boccia Federation. What is unique about this sport? Why did you have the idea to develop boccia in Kazakhstan?

– I am engaged in the development of the federation as its general secretary. Since 2023, our federation has been headed by Maulen Ashimbayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Boccia is a unique Paralympic sport that can be accessible both to people with very severe musculoskeletal disorders and to all other groups of the population: healthy, elderly, with various other health conditions.

Athletes with musculoskeletal system injuries are allowed to participate in national and international boccia competitions according to the international classification of para-athletes (classes BC1, BC2, BC3, BC4).

We started developing it in Kazakhstan in 2017, thanks to the initiative of our colleague, physi-



cal education teacher and Kazakhstan's first boccia coach Sultanbek Orynbassarov, who, unfortunately, died in 2021 at the age of only 24. In just a few years of passionate coaching, he has come a long way. He coached several groups of boccia athletes, managed to create the capital boccia federation, and held several city competitions. He dreamed of helping children with disabilities become real athletes and raise them to be Paralympic champions.

After his passing, my colleagues and I decided to continue his dream. In 2021, the Republican Public Association "Kazakhstan Boccia Federation" was established and began to engage in the systematic development and popularization of this sport.

At that time, under our foundation, within the framework of the project, boccia sections were already working in 16 cities, the best athletes of which we began to select for the national team of Kazakhstan through holding Championships and Cups of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Why boccia? Boccia is an ideal tool for developing inclusion in sports. This game can bring together people of different ages, healthy and with disabilities. Playing boccia helps to develop dexterity, accuracy and tactical thinking. It's like a game of chess, but on the court and with balls. In addition, its peculiarity is that it is played by two, four or six people, that is, individual, paired team competitions are held in this sport.

**– How many athletes are united by the Boccia Federation and what results have our athletes managed to achieve?**

– The Boccia family is growing by 20-30% every year. In total, the number of boccia athletes in Kazakhstan, taking into account the children of the Salamatty Bolashak project and the children who have already been enrolled in regional and city sports clubs for athletes with disabilities, has reached 300 people. These are children and adults with different diagnoses: cerebral palsy, mental abnormalities, genetic diseases, injuries or diseases of the spine. We also have boccia sections for healthy kids, as a rule, they are attended by brothers and sisters of our special athletes.

As to top-level sports, then our national boccia team of the Republic of Kazakhstan includes 41

**"Although adaptive sports are becoming more accessible in Kazakhstan, there are still many barriers"**

people. Every year, the number of participants in national competitions increases by 30%. We started going to international competitions with an average of 4 to 8 athletes starting in 2023. We have been twice to Poland, Greece, Finland and even to the Asian Para Games in China. We have achieved significant success in the international arena, taking 3rd place in the team and individual boccia competitions in Lahti (Finland).

**– This year the Paralympics were held in Paris. Did the athletes of the Kazakhstan Boccia Federation participate in the Summer Games?**

– Our national team shows outstanding results with every Paralympic Games, thanks to the high level of training, iron will and great solidarity of the athletes. This year they won a record 9 medals, of which two gold, three silver and 4 bronze. And I am sure that at the next games in 2028 in Los Angeles, the result of our national team will be no less impressive. In boccia, we have not yet managed to win a license for the Paralympic Games in Paris, since just a year ago we started taking part in ranking boccia competitions. But we have four years ahead of us, during which, I believe, we will definitely win boccia licenses.

**– Does the Boccia Federation receive support from the state, as well as business and civil institutions?**

– On the part of the state, in the development of the Paralympic sport of boccia, we feel the support of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, local executive bodies represented by the



Departments of Physical Education and Sports clubs for athletes with disabilities, the republican center for sports training of athletes with disabilities. Fruitful work with government agencies does not stop.

Since 2023, our general sponsor, the Sport Qory Foundation for Support of the Tourism and Sports Industry, has been providing significant assistance to the Boccia Federation. We are very pleased with the fact that business is showing sincere interest in the development of boccia in Kazakhstan. For example, this year, thanks to the Eurasian ERG Group of Companies, we held free seminars on adaptive physical education and boccia for 200 teachers in five regions of the republic, five inclusive boccia tournaments, in addition, we provided boccia sections in these regions with special sports equipment. In 2025, we plan to organize a seminar for boccia coaches, where we intend to attract international mentors and sports psychologists.

Cooperation with various public and private institutions helps us not only to develop boccia at a high professional level, but also to popularize this game among Kazakhstanis as a massive and accessible inclusive sport.

Last year, we were financially supported by the companies Kaspi Bank, Tsesna Bank, YDD Corporation, MT Atlant. With the funds allocated by them, we held a number of competitions, took part in international training camps and compe-

titions. Society is gradually beginning to realize the importance of helping to spread adaptive sports, but of course we still have something to work on.

**– What does an inclusive society mean in your understanding?**

– In my opinion, an inclusive society is a society where everyone has equal access to all opportunities, regardless of physical limitations and social status, these are conditions in which people are actively involved and interact.

**– What do you dream about?**

– I dream that my parents would be happy and stay by my side as long as possible, that my children would create their own strong future and happy families. I dream of growing old with my spouse in good health and clear consciousness, pampering my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It seems to be banal, but so important! Of course, as a public figure who promotes the interests of people with disabilities in sports, I dream that Kazakhstani para-athletes will keep amaze the world of para-sports with their incredible victories and inspire the younger "special" children to live actively, without complexes, as independently as possible and feel confident about the future.



**Madina Sautbekova:**

# On the mission of the charity fund: "We give hope"

*The working day of the head of the charity fund "AZAMATSHA KZ" Madina Sautbekova is scheduled to the minute. The mother of seven children, the youngest child is only two years old, is active in social activities. Her wards are women who find themselves in a difficult life situation.*



Ten years ago, Madina Sautbekova had her own business, at the same time she headed the non-government organization "Alliance of Rural Youth "Murager", within which she promoted the interests of the younger generation, engaged in employment of graduates of educational institutions. In 2021, the activist created a charitable foundation to help women. She was pushed to this decision by motherhood and a difficult life path.

"When I became a mother of many children, I decided to open a charitable fund. We provide assistance to mothers of many children, single mothers, mothers with disabilities or those women who raise children with special needs, as well as convicts. "Azamatsha" means "citizen" in Kazakh. And who is a citizen? This is a woman who knows her rights and is responsible for her life and the lives of her children," - Madina Sautbekova explains.

The fund provides legal, psychological and social support to women. In addition, the social activist actively conducts information and educational activities, increases the self-awareness of rural women and teaches independence.

"Rural women often come to us who believe that they themselves will not be able to change anything in their lives. They have high expectations from the state. If they have many children, they think that the state is obliged to provide them with

housing, social benefits, or they want to be helped to open a business. In general, someone has to come and solve their problems. But it doesn't happen that way. Before we take anything from the state, we must learn to give. This is the active civic position. At the fund, we are working to change the way women think, to help them believe in themselves and their strengths," – the social activist shares.

As activities expanded, there was a need to improve women's literacy. Together with like-minded women, Madina organized a training center, which offers courses in computer literacy, sewing, accounting, as well as training in manicure, eyelash extensions, massage therapists and specialists in other services. Thus, women who apply to the fund for help are helped to become independent. Madina Sautbekova's principled position is to provide women with the opportunity to earn money for their own existence, rather than hoping for a one-time allocation of funds or products.

"It is necessary to engage in self-education, I always attract women to study. If women themselves do not know the history of Kazakhstan, the language and laws of the country in which they live, do not know how to write and express their thoughts competently, how can they raise children?" – the social activist continues.

She also considers it her duty to take care of the leisure of mothers and children. Every year, she appeals to sponsors – educational institutions, recreation centers, fitness salons, with a request for grants for training and certificates. As a result, children from low-income and large families can go to clubs, go on vacation for free. Last year alone, thanks to the fund, 820 children visited nearby rest homes.

"We go with mothers and children to the Gorkiy Park in Almaty, to swimming pools, dolphinariums, organize trips to the circus, to Medeo, to the mountains. What are we trying to achieve with this? Firstly, rural children see what wonder-







ful cities and wonderful country we have. Secondly, they learn to socialize in society. Most importantly, we help to maintain the relationship between mother and child, create conditions for their joint communication. Often, parents with many children do not have time to devote time to their child, they are busy with work. But we explain to parents that it is not enough to clothe and feed children, we need to communicate and talk with them, develop them as worthy citizens of the country,” – Madina Sautbekova shares.

The doors of her office are always open to women who find themselves in a difficult situation. There are many meetings for them within the walls of the fund with the participation of psychologists, police department employees, and activists of public funds. Madina often acts as a speaker and mentor herself.

“We organize festive events for moms, tea parties to pull them out of the cycle in which they are stuck. When women come to us, they realize that they are not alone and someone needs them. Many of our women have low self-esteem, they don’t go out, they do household job. Here they get hope, open up and learn to enjoy life,” – she says.



Now the fund’s wards actively participate in conferences and round tables on various relevant topics, starting with changes to the law on domestic violence and ending with the need to vaccinate children.

Now the activist is well known in the city of Kaskelen and the surrounding areas. Over the past year, she traveled to all the settlements of the Almaty region, met with women, found out what kind of help they needed.

“I went to settlements and conducted trainings on how to become a successful and happy woman. They have received many kind responses. Women are impressed that I am a mother of many children, like many of them, I come from an ordinary family, I was raised by my grandparents. My listeners understand that you can become successful, you can achieve something in life, not only through connections or something else. My example greatly inspires them, and I am happy about it,” – the social activist smiles.

One of the latest projects of the AZAMAT-SHA KZ Fund is dedicated to working with convicted women. Throughout the year, Madina Sautbekova has been visiting the women’s prison of the Almaty region,



providing psychological and legal support to women. Her goal is to return mothers to children who are social orphans.

“There are such sad statistics. Of the 625 convicted women, 210 are in prison for murdering their live-in lovers or husbands. Do you understand? This is the result of poor prevention of family domestic violence. If we assume that each of these women has three children, it turns out that 2,100 children are, in fact, social orphans. There are different women in the prison, we help those who want to change their lives, conduct trainings, individual conversations and consultations, therapy. We want to return mothers to children,” – the head of the fund sums up.

Recently, AZAMATSHA KZ won a grant from the French Embassy on gender policy in the field of work with convicted women. As part of this project, on the first of December, Madina Sautbekova plans to open a training center in the women’s prison of the Almaty region. The point is that six months before being released, convicted women will be able to study those specialties that do not require a certificate of no criminal record.

“After graduation, a woman will receive a new specialty and certificate, this will allow her to find a job, start her own business and possibly return her child, connect with her children. That is, the project will also help to minimize social orphanhood, because in reality there are few real orphans in Kazakhstan. Mostly we have orphans with living parents,” – says Madina.

The social activist has been preparing for implementation of this project for a whole year. In the future, she dreams of spreading it throughout the country.

“If this project is successful and proves its social significance, then we want to spread it to other prisons. We, as a civil society, must support convicted women. Imagine if she gets out of prison and stays with herself. What should she do? As a rule, relatives immediately turn away from such women. No one supports them. Only children are waiting for

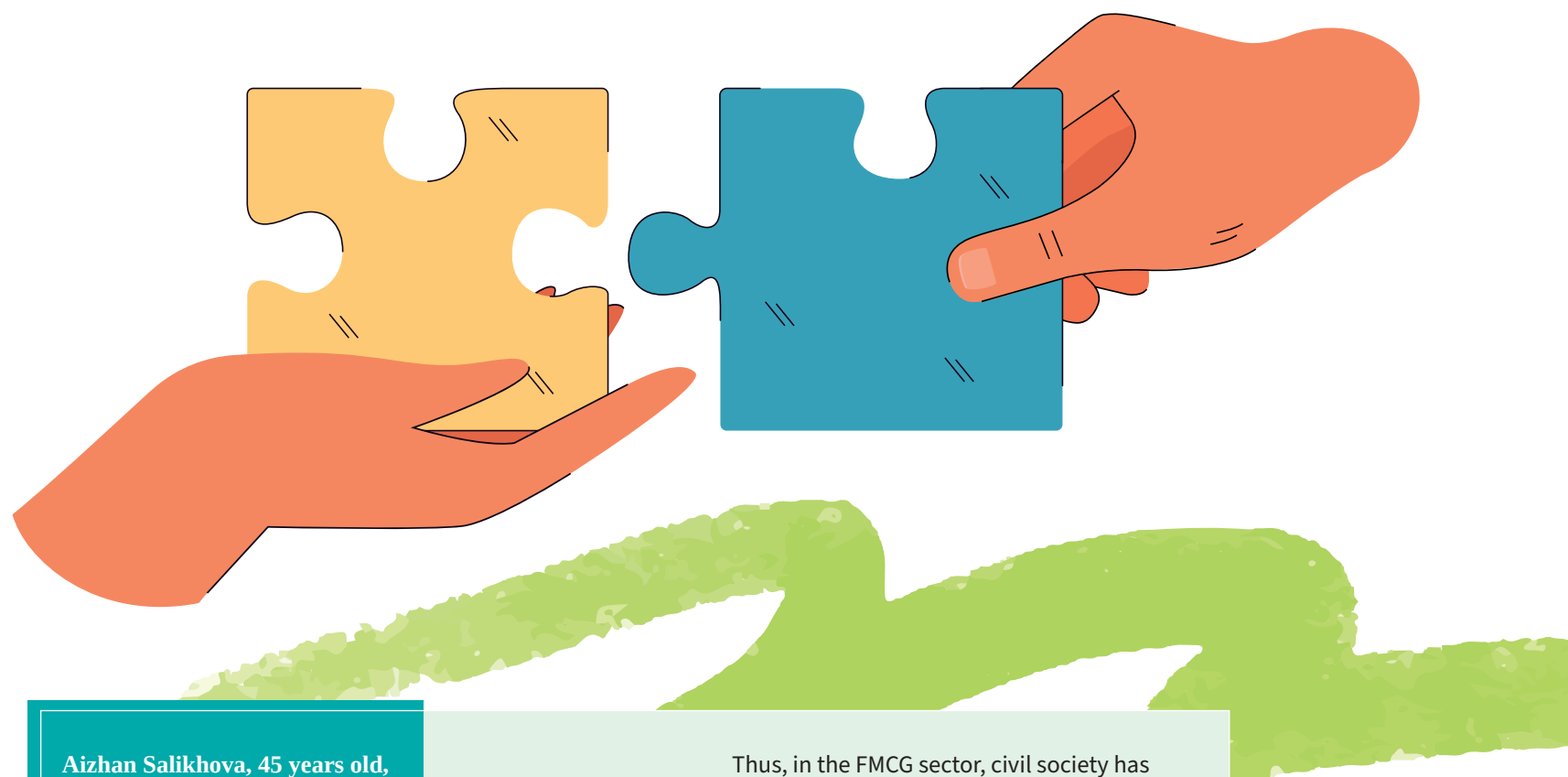
“WE ORGANIZE FESTIVE EVENTS FOR MOMS, TEA PARTIES TO PULL THEM OUT OF THE CYCLE IN WHICH THEY ARE STUCK. WHEN WOMEN COME TO US, THEY REALIZE THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE AND SOMEONE NEEDS THEM”

her, and children love any mother. Therefore, my task, as a member of the Commission on Juvenile Affairs under the Akimat of the Almaty region, a member of probation commission in the Karasai district, is to ensure that this woman, upon returning from the prison, does not commit a crime again, but takes her children. Children find their mother, their mother find a family. This family is still a social unit,” – sums up the head of AZAMAT-SHA KZ fund.

Madina’s husband and children support her in her work. Her eldest daughter is already volunteering at the fund, teaching English. In addition, a team of like-minded women became a reliable support for social activist: psychologist Yelena Semenova, fitness coach Medina Gorbachyova, mothers of many children who were once supported by the public fund actively help. Despite the abundance of cases and projects, Madina Sautbekova continues to set goals and dream.

“My big dream is to become a part of the National Commission on Women’s Affairs under the President. I am sure that this will allow me to bring even more benefit to society and more effectively defend the rights and interests of Kazakhstani women,” – the civil activist noted.

# RAPID-FIRE QUESTIONS CIVIL SOCIETY IS...



**Aizhan Salikhova, 45 years old,  
entrepreneur**

Civil society is a group of caring people united by the desire to make the world a better place, regardless of what they do. This is a group that does not act under duress or for profit, but according to internal beliefs and values. They take the initiative, create public organizations, volunteer and actively participate in solving social issues — from ecology and human rights to support vulnerable segments of the population and animal protection.

My activity is related to the FMCG sector (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), a sector of consumer goods that sell quickly and have a relatively low price. These include food, beverages, household goods, personal care products, cosmetics and others that consumers purchase regularly.

Thus, in the FMCG sector, civil society has a significant impact on the market. Modern consumers are increasingly focused on social responsibility and environmental awareness of the companies they support. This means that it is important for us to understand what these people need and take into account their values.

If before they simply chose a product based on price and quality, now they look at the history of the brand, how it affects the world. Therefore, for us, civil society is not just an audience, but a partner who helps to improve our product and makes us responsible. We strive to follow these trends, invest in sustainable projects, support the environment and social initiatives in order to become closer to the consumer and together with customer form a new society where care, responsibility and informed choice are important.

**Temirtas Iskakov, 33 years old,  
urban architect**

For me, as an urbanist and a supporter of the idea of a just city, the institution of citizenship is equivalent to the institution of "urbanism": you cannot live in a city or a country and be only a passive resident. Citizen differs from a resident in that he cares. This matters when state institutions work incorrectly or inefficiently, when the law and the rights of his own, his relatives, neighbors or fellow citizens are violated. This matters when trouble comes to someone else's house or when a threat looms over the common house.

Civil society is a society of solidarity and empathy. This is the main element of a fair and secure country. It unites public institutions and active citizens: non-profit organizations, foundations, associations, independent media, trade unions, initiative groups and volunteers. All of them ensure balance and control over the actions of the state, defend our rights, protect and help others, work to solve social, cultural, environmental problems, express the opinion and position of individual citizens, communities and public institutions.

At the same time, the state should in no case fight with civil society, even if it does not like its opinions and position. On the contrary, the state should support and create conditions for development of civil society institutions: provide opportunities for activities of NGOs, support freedom of speech and assembly, protect the rights of activists and journalists, and be open to dialogue with civil initiatives.

*Cooperation between the State and civil society makes it possible to solve problems more effectively and transparently, since civil institutions often better understand the needs and problems of society by working on the ground. This approach helps to increase public confidence in the government, strengthen democracy and sustainable development of the country.*

**Yerbolat Sultanov, 47 years old,  
serviceman**

What is civil society? Of course, it is easier for civilians, especially public activists, to answer this question. After all, for me, as a military man, the concept of "state" is closer. The armed forces, the guard, the police and other law enforcement agencies are called upon to protect not only the people, but also the state, the main institution of population management.

*But on the other hand, I understand perfectly well that we live in the 21st century, and everything in this world is interconnected. People in uniform are the same citizens, only performing specific tasks. So we all need to develop a civil society.*

For us, the military, the issue of state-society relations is very relevant. The main thing is that there should be a balance between them and there should be partnership, and even better, friendly relations. The principle is very simple – we, the military, protect citizens, and citizens treat us kindly, with understanding and support us in all endeavors. Not indiscriminate criticism of the army for every accident, but kind words, joint activities so that a military man is happy that he is perceived positively and is valued. If a difficult situation happens, then the military and citizens must act together, in one team.

I'll give you an example. Do you still remember how our guards helped the population of the regions affected by floods this spring? Many volunteers worked closely with us. Or let's take another moment – every day our soldiers and sergeants patrol the streets of cities and always come to the aid of the population if any trouble happens - they find lost children, save them from suicide, fire and much more. Most of the nearby citizens support the Guards in these matters.

This is what civil society really is, without any unnecessary arguments. In other words, it is a society where citizens have a high level of consciousness and culture. Where there is a developed civil society, there is also a state governed by the rule of law at the appropriate level, and everyone benefits from this: leaders, military personnel, ordinary citizens. This is an ideal model of the modern world, which we all need to strive for.





**Bisenbay Jeksenov, 68 years old,  
honorary veteran of the Ministry of  
Emergency Situations**

In our Soviet past, civil society was replaced by a strong, comprehensive ideology. Of course, there was less motivation and interest among people, everything was on command, but education, medicine, and housing were free.

The ideology was laid down from the pioneers and the Komsomol. For example, I still remember how they wanted to expel me from the pioneers for some misconduct. At the school assembly, in front of everyone, they practically took off my pioneer tie, which brought me to tears, but in the end they limited themselves to a warning.

The modern world, of course, is completely different. Today the issue of civil engagement is very acute. One of its manifestations can be called volunteering. This year, the "Taza Kazakhstan" campaign is being held throughout the country, which united Kazakhstanis in an effort to make our world cleaner and more beautiful. Thousands of people went out to clean up the territories, landscaping, and I also consider this an expression of civil position.

Personally, I take care of the trees in my yard, I am active in matters of our APO (Association of Property Owners), I speak in the media about the problems that concern me. That is, I try to contribute to the development of society and the country. This is probably what everyone who is interested in building a strong civil society should do.

**Natalya Tyulyaeva, 38 years old,  
teacher**

In our daily life, we rarely think about such concepts as "civil society", but we feel the activity of its various structures on ourselves. In my understanding, this is a hard work of the citizens of our country and the state aimed at improving the life and well-being of the people, a dialogue between the "hearing state" and the citizen to solve educational, social and legal difficulties.

Of course, it is possible and necessary to publicly discuss common problems, thereby increasing the degree of trust and mutual importance. Today we see a stable development of self-government and self-realization of citizens. People openly talk about difficulties and look for solutions together with the state.

Various centers of assistance to citizens are opened – for training, employment, business creation, psychological, programs of which also make life easier for people. Housing programs are being implemented for different groups of the population, and assistance is being provided to vulnerable social groups. That is, the state hears society, provides assistance to it, and this dialogue is an important link in the further development of the whole country.

**Ayim Asylkhanova, 20 years old,  
student**

Civil society in any country is the main source of manifestation of the true will of the people or individual social groups. People who are part of civil society help government agencies to build a vector of movement of domestic and foreign policy. But listening, encouraging or ignoring and persecuting these citizens is the choice of the current government.

*Any country living according to the principles of democracy and human rights recognizes the power of the people and meets their needs. These are the needs that civil society (be it social, political, cultural or other spheres) expresses through independent media, NGOs, trade unions or other non-governmental associations.*

But what distinguishes civil society from society as a whole? Society is all people living on the territory of the country, and civil society is those who lead an active civil life: they vote, observe elections, follow the political agenda and course of the country, actively defend their rights, go to rallies and pickets to express their interests and take care of the rights of citizens of this state. Government control is necessary in a young democracy, and it is civil society that helps state structures build national accord, legitimacy and respect for the constitution.

Free civil society that is not persecuted by an authoritarian Government is the main authority of an independent State. But I have not seen this in my life and in my country yet, which motivates me to be a part of the changes and the independence of my Homeland.





**Edil Shalov, 47 years old,  
traumatologist**

Civic engagement, in my opinion, is a conscious process that is performed by a person based on altruism and a desire to help other people, that is, volunteering. The maturity of society and the tranquility in the country determines precisely the availability of opportunities for such actions on the part of citizens.

Volunteering should be regarded as a step in the spiritual growth of a person, the realization of the inner need of a decent, good-natured, compassionate person. These people have reached an understanding in their development that you need to do something that will bring you moral pleasure and emotional inspiration tomorrow.

Basically, volunteering is practiced by

our youth, even if sometimes for the sake of populism, because it is encouraged by the state. Today, it is quite simple to realize oneself through civic activity, there are a lot of areas for volunteering. In Soviet times, we studied works like "Timur and his team". And when my child wanted to volunteer, I didn't mind.

*I myself show civic activity in being kind to others, my profession motivates me to do this, I have always been compassionate about everything related to health. Of course, I sincerely bow to true altruists with a strong civic position.*



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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