

Bill Bowring - Experience in Kazakhstan

1. I take a particular interest in the countries of Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, although I have travelled also to work as an expert for international organisations in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
2. My first visit to Kazakhstan took place in 1996, when I travelled to Almaty both to take part in the start of an EU funded project training human rights trainers; and to teach human rights at a Summer University at KIMEP University organised by the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation).
3. I returned several times to teach at the Summer University, and in relation to the training project. This project brought me into close contact with the leading Kazakh human rights organisations and activists, including the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, led for more than a decade by Yevgeny Zhovtis and Maria Pulman, the Helsinki Committee and others; and I have continued working with them ever since.
4. In 2000 and 2001 I travelled several times to Kazakhstan, Almaty and Astana, with Mr Max Van der Stoep, the former Foreign Minister of The Netherlands, and High Commissioner on National Minorities for the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), advising him on minority rights issues, and taking part in a wide variety of meetings with representatives of various minorities in Kazakhstan, as well as with government officials.
5. From 1999 to 2002 I led the European Commission Tempus TACIS Joint European Project “Creation of the Centre for Pedagogical Jurisprudence” with a leading Kazakh law university. This joint work included training of human rights teachers, and production of textbooks, and I traveled several times to Almaty and Astana in relation to the project.
6. In 2000-2001 I acted as expert for the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), assisting Kazakh government and civil society in preparing for and reporting back from Kazakhstan’s first Periodic Report under the

UN Convention Against Torture. This involved a number of seminars, round table meetings and training in Almaty and Astana.

7. From 2002 to 2003 I was the lead expert in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project on behalf of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Project INT/97/R12 – 01 KAZ 2190 “Promotion of International Human Rights Standards in Kazakhstan”, assisting Kazakh government and NGOs in preparing for the belated ratification by Kazakhstan of the UN’s two International Covenants on Human Rights. I took part in seminars and round table meetings on several occasions in Almaty and Astana.
8. From 2003 to 2006 I was a Mentor for the OSI’s Central Asia Research Initiative (CARI) programme, supervising a post-doctoral student who is a law lecturer at the Karaganda State University in the city of Karaganda, northern Kazakhstan. I travelled several times to Karaganda and the industrial city of Timurtau, where he lives, in order to assist his studies.
9. In August 2006 I travelled to Astana for a week at the invitation of the new government-sponsored Eurasian University named after Lev Gumilyov, to assist their Law Department in establishing a PhD programme, and to teach human rights to law students. I returned to Astana from 20 to 26 May 2007, and from 19 to 26 July 2008, for the same purpose.
10. In addition to many official reports written for international organisations in the context of the projects mentioned above, I have published articles on the problems of the region.¹
11. I am one of the most experienced experts concerning Kazakhstan, and the nature of my work has brought me into constant contact with the often embattled human rights defenders, as well as with government and law enforcement officials. This has given me unique insights into the problems of the country. Appearances in Kazakhstan as elsewhere can be deceptive. The existence of lively civil society organisations does not mean that Kazakhstan is a democracy. It is governed on the basis of a clan

¹ See, for example, Bill Bowring "Postcolonial Transitions on the Southern Borders of the Former Soviet Union: The Return of Eurasianism?" in John Strawson and Roshan de Silva Wijeyeratne (eds) "Tracking the Postcolonial in Law", special issue of the *Griffith Law Review* (2003) v.12, n.2, pp.238-262; Bill Bowring "Law, Customary: Central Asia" in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, volume 2 (2004, Brill, Leiden)

system, by a president, Mr Nazarbaev, who was the senior Communist Party official. Although Russians remain in substantial numbers in Kazakhstan, over 25% of the population, they are entirely excluded from government service or public life, and providing they engage in business, as most do, are left alone. But anyone who poses a real or perceived threat to the regime can expect retribution which will include torture and quite likely death.