



## PRESS RELEASE

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### ARTICLE 19 CONDEMNS RAID ON KAZAKH PUBLISHER

**ARTICLE 19 condemns the 27 January 2004 police raid on the office of Kazakh publishing house *Arsenal*. The raid appears to be part of a pattern of harassment of *Arsenal* and its owners and managers, designed to undermine its ability to exercise fully its right to freedom of expression.**

*Arsenal*'s offices were raided by a team of police officers on 27 January 2004. The raid was formally justified by reference to charges of "malignant non-execution of a court decision" brought against *Arsenal* on 26 November 2003 for its failure to move the main wall of its warehouse by 70 centimetres, as ordered in a case originally decided in 2002. The police left after two and a half hours, and confiscated *Arsenal*'s lists of employees, their contact details and an outline of their assignments. It is unclear how the raid in any way serves to further the legal process relating to the 2002 case. Vladimir Mikhailov, questioned during the raid and former Acting Director of *Arsenal*, has asked the authorities to explain how the list of members of *Arsenal* staff and a description of their responsibilities will help resolve the dispute.

Our sources suggest that the police behaved in an unnecessarily aggressive and inappropriate manner during the raid: the *Arsenal* security guards were bound and pushed into the police bus, cameramen were locked into the back rooms, other staff were forbidden to move around and all doors were blocked. Those questioned were not informed of their rights and minutes of these interviews were not taken. Furthermore, no document authorising the raid was produced.

This is the latest of a series of measures against the media group of to which *Arsenal* belongs. In 2002, radio *Rifma*, owned by Mikhailov's father and run by him, was closed for breaching the "Law about Languages". In 1999, *Diapason*, founded by *Rifma*, was suspended for two months in 1999, after a violent campaign against it which included physical assaults on six of its staff. Two criminal cases are currently pending against Mikhailov, the first articles he wrote in *Diapason* criticising local judges and the second relating to work on behalf of *Rifma* television between 1998 and 2001. Mikhailov's brother Pelinskiy was violently attacked in December 2002 and left the country to seek medical treatment.

*Diapason* has a circulation of 33,000, more than ten times that of the official regional newspaper, and, together with radio *Rifma*, is one of the most popular media outlets in the region. Both *Diapason* and *Rifma* are well known for their criticism of the local administration and regional prosecutor's office.

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