

*THE TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND KYRGYZSTAN'S "ABOUT  
NON-COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS" LAW: SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE TOWARDS  
WOMEN AND PERSONS WITH DIVERSE SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY,  
GENDER EXPRESSION AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS (SOGIESC)*

by

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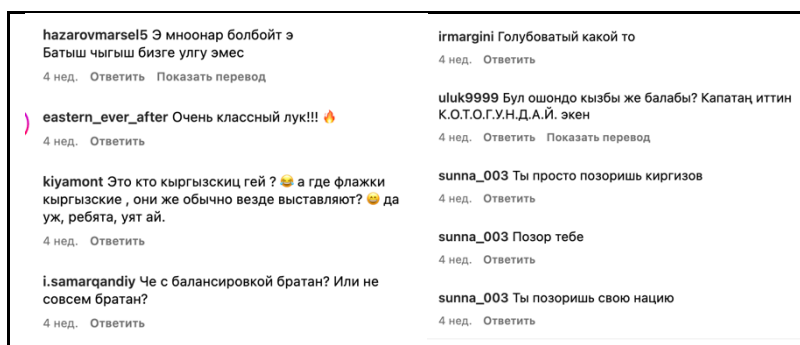
THE TRANSNATIONAL ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND KYRGYZSTAN’S “ABOUT NON-COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS” LAW: SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN AND PERSONS WITH DIVERSE SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER EXPRESSION AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS (SOGIESC) .....	1
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*How is the nationalist-populist regime in Kyrgyzstan using anti-NGO legislation to reinforce  
the issues around gender and women on a transnational level?*

**Keywords:** *Kyrgyzstan, illiberalism, NGOs, traditionalism, populism*

When I moved to New York City to study Global Studies, I once posted a reel standing in front of my internship place. I was in an uplifted mood because I was very proud to wear Kyrgyz traditional pieces. It was a blue and white colored wool hat with traditional embroidery, headphones over them, a trenchcoat that resembled the nomad *chapan*, a traditional light blue vest with golden ornaments all over the front, and brown suede boots. It was all nicely covered by the hacky-colored bag with ornaments, finely suiting the mix of the traditional and contemporary. People started reacting to my video post with pride in culture and beauty, with some notes of decolonization and embracing the culture our people thought of as external and less aesthetic.

After two days, the post went viral on Instagram, and this is when my artificially created reality crashed. Users, the vast majority of whom are Central Asian men, started labeling me as gay, blaming me for my reported “soft” acting [nazdanuu], patronizing and intentionally identifying me as Kazakh, Mongol, Chinese—all but not Kyrgyz. They also argued I am putting shame on our nation, connecting it to the Kyrgyz epic of a masculine hero, requested not to wear the reportedly female bag, and claimed that I am the one “who is prohibited in religion”—all while seemingly being in a more pure and inviolable and hallowed stand. Some did not even care and compared my appearance (*kebeta* used as *kapatah*) to a dog’s fallos.



My post is just one of the instances of aggression directed against individuals with various sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expression, and sex characteristics ([SOGIESC](#)). And this is not the end.

Now, I would want to direct your focus towards the prevalence of violence against women. According to statistics, more than 10,000 women are victims of gender-based violence (Biybosunov and Zhunusova 2023). Ex-husbands or partners murder wives, cut their noses and beat them up to death while bribing the judiciary and police not reacting to incidents, using cultural assumptions and people in media as well as murderers blaming victims and girls (Commercio 2022; 2015; Kim and Campbell 2013; Wiedlack and Zabolotny 2023).

Instead of dealing with both administrative and cultural violence, the government is interested in supporting the disruptive attack by ultranationalist men civil organizations during the International Women's Day march in 2020; inciting whorephobic media violence by posting sex workers' faces on National Security official channels; criticizing and amending the Constitutional Court—the highest country in the country the decisions of which are supposed to be indisputable—decision on lesbian feminist activists' win on getting the right of giving matronymic to her children, and leading talks in parliament about toughening measures for imprisonment for stealing animals, longer than bride kidnapping and commenting it as a tradition (Abduvaitova 2022; Dzhamankulova 2022; Aizhigitov 2023).

The attacks on gender and women's rights are not new. The recent developments in the rising authoritarian strategies of Kyrgyzstan, and recent “On Non-commercial Organizations” laws tightly presented as a threat to national security and traditional values, are part of a transnational anti-gender movement and changing dynamics of the world. While it seems to represent internally rising dynamics, I argue that the Kyrgyz nationalist populist regime, which copied pasted Russian-rooted anti-NGO legislation, strives to maneuver and restrict women and LGBTQ+ supporting organizations, using traditional family values

against the anti-Western neoliberal propaganda. The legislation is not only a powerful instrumentalization of hate towards the West but most importantly towards women and persons with diverse SOGIESC, critical for the question of development. Therefore, the resistance to the discourse should be transnational, too. I will bring the experience of Outright International, my current internship organization, as a potential example of fighting in multilateral spaces.

Within this paper, I will discuss intertwined securitization of anti-gender discourse to the reinforcement of rising authoritarianist and populist regimes, Kyrgyzstan's dynamics and "About Non-commercial Organizations" law—broadly known as the law on "foreign representatives", its potential further consequences on freedom of organization and protection of gender minorities as well as worldly known practices in this field. I will further argue that it is a transnational movement which requires transnational response and organizations. I will be using scholarly articles on anti-gender movements in the world and Kyrgyzstan, illiberalism, and authoritarianism, sources from the network coalition from the organization where I work – Outright International. Outright works on the promotion of all women and LGBTI+ rights at the UN, it is a secretariat to the UN LGBTI Core Group and is part of several networks. My observations and discussions from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), Outright Advocacy Week 2024 will serve as a testimony in this paper.

#### *ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS and RISE OF AUTHORITARIANISM:*

Anti-gender movements and discourse appeared as a reaction to (neo-)liberal international framework of power. It questions modernity, hijacks all formulations about gender, claims to protect children and attacks feminists, gender studies scholars, and NGOs working on gender, dehumanizes people with diverse SOGIESC, and projects the patronizing masculine discourse to the masses which is met with high popularity (Laruelle 2022; Bogaards and Pető 2022; Ergas et al. 2022).

Starting from the Beijing Platform 1995, religious activists, conservative and traditional state, and non-state actors, started mobilizing a transnational anti-gender movement to hijack the international arenas for human/gender rights. These opportunistic actors hijack democratic governance, both through public discourse and through civil society restrictive laws, delegitimizing gender equality activists as well as previously accepted gender policies and norms (Krizsan and Roggeband 2018).

The anti-gender movements are pro-family [traditional heterosexual] non-governmental organizations, majority headquartered in the US, well-funded, and have the consultative status at UN's Economic and Social Council. By claiming civic and international spaces, anti-gender ideologies enter democratic regimes and political parties, dismantle democratic institutions, and use traditional values by blocking legislations about reproductive health, LGBT+, and women's rights, support the victims of gender-based violence and harassment, reproducing the patriarchal and heteronormative state and society (Krizsan and Roggeband 2018, 11).

In European discourse, Victor Orban, and the radical changes in Hungary, seem to be giving a start to a vastly growing anti-gendered illiberal discourse (Takács, Fobear, and Schmitsek 2022; Fodor 2022). He is also known for creating the term "illiberal democracy," created to fight the migration and Soros networks in Hungary, which then was exported to other countries. Attacks on gender discredited academia, specifically my very own Central European University, and forced it to relocate to Austria.

The anti-gender movement is transnational, although it varies from country-specific background. It is often, if not always, accompanied by a shift in the political spectrum. The political discourse is moving to the far right, with the government's radical parties being increasingly popular among the electorate. Scholars have researched anti-gender with rising authoritarianism or "illiberalism" in Western countries (Takács, Fobear, and Schmitsek 2022). According to CIVICUS Global Alliance, anti-rights groups are well-funded by

churches, religious organizations, and countries. The US funding is known in Eastern Europe, and Russia is known for funding in Eurasia. The movement is transnational and much better organized and funded in networks worldwide. It is imminently related and fixed to regimes and ideologies like illiberalism, authoritarianism, populism, and far-right parties. They gender their politics and hijack the understanding of gender and human rights (“Action Against the Anti-Rights Wave” 2018).

Illiberalism, as an ideology, also mobilizes women “without emancipation,” gathering votes through family and welfare appeal, demonizing ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities as the “others” (Pető 2021; Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Gender and women's rights work there as a “symbolic glue” to promote the “illiberal” offer which combines religion, masculine far-right political ideals, family, the nation, and the freedom of speech they entail in their imagination. Anti-gender movement, intertwined with the illiberal, authoritarian, populist regime, is transnational, well-connected, and well-funded by religious and political lobbies throughout the world. Kyrgyzstan is not an exclusion (Pető 2021).

#### *KYRGYZSTAN AS AN EX-ISLAND OF DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL ASIA*

Once seen of as a democratic island in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan erupted into an NGOization process in the early 1990s, adopting a more conservative and anti-gender political stance by drawing on both traditional familial speech and newly developed gendered customs. (Hoare 2016; 2021). Women empowerment in Kyrgyzstan has become a cliché prerogative in the international development agenda of better literacy training, undermining the day-to-day lives of women in rural areas and overlooking the intra-familial structure.

What is happening in Kyrgyzstan now is non-linear and hectic but organized at the same time. The current quasi-populist regime of president Sadyr Zhaparov positions itself as close to people as the government has ever been. He came to power after the coup in 2020,

accentuating family-based traditions to rule, and demonizing feminists and NGOs as external and foreign (Doolotkeldieva 2021; Abdoubaetova 2023). He capitalizes on people's insecurities related to territorial integrity in the face of real and imagined enemies—a fear heightened by the processes of out-migration in the globalization era and expressed in violence against women and LGBT+ people.

The securitized image of the head of the National Security Committee— a version of Russian Federal Security Service, Kamchybek Tashiev, further exacerbates the current state. He positions himself as a “grey cardinal” who is working efficiently with corruption in the country, searching and imprisoning the opposition, independent media representatives, and opinionated artists, but this often does not see the borders of the state rationality (Putz 2023; Lozovsky 2024). State borders on punishing actual criminals, whose stayed as a legacy from the Soviet Union, or corrupt people or business owners are often blurred. The state has put its hands much further suffocating business and enacting laws for international or local organizations.

Now, I must mention that this anti-foreign or anti-Western discourse is the reproduction of Russian public discourse. But the Kyrgyzstani government has instrumentalized it far better. Using the “traditional values” language widely known in Russia, our government contextualized it back in the 90s as a part of the re-traditionalization and coming back to historical Kyrgyz values (Kim et al. 2018; Fodor 2022; Abdoubaetova 2023). This controlled the public and private lives of people, framing the regime as collectivist and masculine in decision-making. It created a strong image of an ideal family, and ideal life pathway and set out clear gender norms and labor division. One must be a heterosexual, get married, and have many children, preferably sons (Kim 2020). As in many countries, women's bodily and intellectual autonomy is never granted for free. Women were “valuable possessions of the nation” and men had to sustain the real Kyrgyz masculinity as breadwinners and decision-makers in the family (Singh 2021; Varshney 2021; Kim 2022).



Unfortunately, the state visualized only heterosexual married people. Kyrgyz nation's ideological supremacy grew in political prominence, solidifying it through the previous Soviet elevation of motherhood and canceling of the third gender in "bacha"—young and handsome boys in tea houses in Central Asian villages— (Peshkova and Thibault 2022; Buelow 2017). Contemporary ethno-nationalistic politics hijacked the Soviet Union's "woman question" to objectify Kyrgyz women as carriers of "pure Kyrgyz" customs, including virginity check and bride kidnapping and creating dichotomies like men/women, old/new, development/tradition, and social institutions (Kim 2020). The regime further marginalized LGBTI+ people, integrated masculinity through national epic heroes like Manas, religious dynamics in national policies, and reinforced masculine traits like *batyr*, *jigit*, and *erkek* [hero, young man, and man] to help men reclaim their ethnic identity as religious and "hard" masculine.

Parliament also voted on the first Ombudswoman's resignation in response to her annual report on human and women's rights, normalizing gender-based violence and perpetuating the patriarchal notion of women as mere reproductive organs (Dragolea 2022; Beyer and Kojobekova 2019). This way, the current government reinforces the discourse on violence and issues being dismissed on the public level, diminishing the rights of women and gender minorities, and seeing violence and control over their bodies as normal and a part of the tradition. This way, allegedly focusing on the traditions, history, and culture, the regime serves the transnational needs of the region and the world. Despite its unique setting, it recycles old anti-Western rhetoric and frames feminists, members of gender minorities, and NGOs with funding from outside sources as traitors to the nationalist framework, among other targets (Varshney 2021, 135; Waetjen 2001). The laws as moralizing instruments, followed by the “Putin-style state-led democracy” are covered under the Kyrgyzstani national security and “traditional” traditions (Jackson 2012; Abdoubaetova 2023; Waller 2023). The latter entailed the anti-Western prerogative on the non-governmental organizations which

promote gender diversity, and thus disrupt the traditional Kyrgyz values (Simpson 2006; Kim et al. 2018; Borbieva 2012). Despite the three coups in 2005, 2010, and 2020, believed to be initiated by civilians, there is a growing dissatisfaction with international and local NGOs or “nekommercheskiye organizatsii” (rus.) with foreign funding, falling into the radar of populist ethno-nationalist agenda.

### *ANTI-NGO LAW AS A PART OF THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT*

Anti-NGO law is a serious threat to the civic space and advocacy in Kyrgyzstan. Even before the enforcement of the law, anti-gender actors, partially penetrating the government bodies, started making attacks on gender and women's rights. Let me now briefly go through them.

Before going to gender minorities, anti-gender movement in Kyrgyzstan integrated hostile state-centered anti-feminist political manifestations, claiming binary gender norms and a family between a man and a woman, pushing back, and stopping gender advocacy and operations (Bogaards and Pető 2022). Nadira Narmatova, the co-author of the anti-NGO legislation and twice the deputy member of the parliament, together with her colleague Shailoobek Atazov, known for anti-LGBT rhetoric in parliament discussions, have offered to restrict the travel of women below the age of 23 and protect from losing morals abroad (Masaliyeva 2023; Dzhambankulova 2022; Sultanalieva 2023). Another deputy member Meikinbek Abdaliev, proposing a severe punishment for animal stealing longer than for kidnapping, commented that bride kidnapping has been the Kyrgyz tradition, and women are not sold further as animals (Aizhigitov 2023).

You have now the image of events happening at the same with the development of the law and the public discourse. Now let me walk you through the package of legislations, affecting the freedom of association, expression, and speech:

- “*On non-commercial organizations*” (“Закон КР От 15 Октября 1999 Года № 111 “О Некоммерческих Оп” 2024)

*...a foreign non-profit organization or a non-profit organization whose activities involve violence against citizens or other harm to their health, or encouraging citizens to refuse to perform civil duties or commit other illegal acts...*

It is an 80% copy of the Russian “Foreign Actors” or “On Control over the Activities of Persons Operating under Foreign Influence”<sup>1</sup> and “On non-commercial Organizations”<sup>2</sup> legislations.

- *“On measures to prevent harm to children's health, their physical, intellectual, mental, spiritual and moral development in the Kyrgyz Republic” (Jorokulova 2014) (“Kyrgyz Republic - United States Department of State”)*

Tilek Taalaibekov, a head of GONGO (government-organized NGO) “People and Law” expressed his concerns that the children and women live with 15 other people in one room, they lose *familial values* and should marry to avoid the chances of becoming prostitutes (Elkeeva 2018; Kim 2022). While these cases seem to be different, they are an illiberal reaction and hate mechanism to the neoliberal understanding of gender and foreign-funded non-governmental organizations.

- *“On mass media” (Lozovsky 2024; BBC News Русская служба 2023)*

The government tried to shut down the website of the Kyrgyzstani branch of Radio Liberty “Azattyk,” sued another independent media outlet “Kloop Media” and arrested 11 independent journalists after an early-morning house investigation. The National Security is accusing them of organizing a government overthrow (Abduvaitova 2022; Orlova 2024).

*WHAT ANTI-NGO LAW ENTAILS:*

<sup>1</sup> <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/8087/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7921/>

The government uses the popular anti-NGO and anti-West discourse to sustain its regime (Pető 2021). The traditional populist government positions feminists and NGOs as agents of the West to deny gender discourse while reinforcing binary gender division and the strong need for the protection of children from unwanted information. As a result of these laws and constructed discourse of hate, NGOs for women's rights and gender, are highly susceptible to government interventions, and the control over funding will doom the gender situation in Kyrgyzstan (Ergas et al. 2022, 124; Orozobaev 2022; Podol'skaya 2023).

Moreover, the legislation is a copy-cat of the Russian Criminal Code, [Article 239](#) on “Creation of a non-profit organization that encroaches on the personality and rights of citizens,” proving the transnational nature of the attack on NGOs and independent media (Orozobaev 2022; Waller 2023). Last April, the speaker of the Kyrgyzstani parliament met with the head of the Russian Duma, who reinforced the growing need for cooperation in the legislation about non-commercial organizations, as they are “blurring the sovereignty, noting that the “future can be formed only by the people who live in an independent and sovereign country” (Otorbaev 2023). So, one can observe the long-lasting cooperation on the point, instrumentalizing national security and sovereignty.

OHCHR stated that the extensive oversight over NGOs/NCOs framing their operations as “political activities” and registration as “foreign representatives” led to self-censoring of the documentation and materials, forced liquidation of the organization, and extra checks by public authorities. Most importantly, it is a violation of international human rights law (“Kyrgyzstan: New Law Risks Undermining Work of NGOs” 2024). From the international norms perspective, according to Article 22 of the ICCPR and ODIHR Guidelines on Freedom of Association (para. 218), the funding of organizations can come from any legitimate source. A more expanded analysis from the International Center for Non-Profit Law [ICNL](#) also turns attention to registration as “foreign representatives,” annual submission of an audit report, and the extraordinary power of the Ministry of Justice to

interfere with arbitrary visits and have the right to liquidate organizations without a court decision (Honstein 2024).

Not only is the law On Non-commercial Organizations limiting the legitimate funding of organizations that depend on international organizations, but also it leads to potential termination due to the inability to afford the yearly audit. The latter usually requires an external audit organization's expertise. Women's rights organizations suffer more from audits and dismantling and discursive and physical discreditation using force and administrative violence (Roggeband and Krizsan 2020, 36)

Additionally, the vague definition of "Political activity," which the legislators instrumentalize on purpose, may potentially lay an umbrella of human rights organizations under threat, forcing them to register as "foreign representatives" and their publications and works as produced by "foreign representatives." It leads to stigmatization of human rights, gender rights organizations. The stigma of "foreign representatives," thus, reproduces the anti-Western political discourse, framing the organizations working for the external government's interest instead of Kyrgyzstan.

The provisional government body policing the law will be the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). It is quite ironic as it will deliver unjust provisions. It has yet to publish a detailed document on its decisions, it is projected to have too much power in interfering in NGO activities, which is contradictory to Article 5 of the Law of the KR on Noncommercial Organizations. Not only does it go against part 2 of Article 53 which is carrying out any activities which don't contradict the Constitution, but it also violates the bank secrecy stated in part 4 of Article 67. The NGO law requires the names of directors and transparency on banking activities. It also provides only 10 days for the cooling off period, with a suspension of activities decided by the MoJ, without the court decision.

*REACTION OF INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL COALITIONS:*

After the first reading passage of the law in the parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic, the international agenda comprised of the European Union Delegation and the Embassies of Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States made a joint [statement](#) (Press and information team of the Delegation to Kyrgyzstan 2024). They note the law has the potential to hurt the most vulnerable sectors like food, education, and healthcare, and those partner organizations which build democracy and justice in Kyrgyzstan. The last is threatening to the work of organizations on operating freely and consolidating international norms [that Kyrgyzstan has signed and is part of many].

A combined letter of more than 120 organizations, including the ones working on women's poverty, care crisis centers addressed the cancellation of the legislation review (“Ряд международных организаций призвал власти КР отклонить законопроект, ограничивающий деятельность НКО” 2023). According to the director of “Women's Support Center,” only 44% of women are officially employed and are on the second shift, and 43% of general civil society organizations work on supporting economically vulnerable populations in poverty (Platforma KG 2023; Asian Development Bank 2011). Thus, by constantly policing the publications and funding of NGOs through additional reports—which were actively involved in passing legislations on bride kidnapping, domestic violence, and facilitating women's quota in politics—the government is purportedly shutting down the proper support to women and gender minorities in vulnerable positions (Commercio 2022).

#### *TRANSNATIONALITY:*

Anti-gender discourse is not only happening in Kyrgyzstan but everywhere in the world as a reaction to the neoliberal framing of gender. Yet, along these transnational power dynamics, marginalized women and gender minorities suffer the most. The legislations formulate the feminist and LGBT+ activism or support as a foreign threat, with vague formulations of “violent activities against citizens or other harm to their health” (“Law of the

Kyrgyz Republic No. 111 dated October 15, 1999 ‘On Non-profit Organizations’” 2023). By limiting foreign representation and requiring even further funding transparency, the government is monopolizing the meaning of “violence against citizens,” thus reinforcing systemic oppression, and, most importantly, leaving women and gender minorities without proper juridical, emotional, and economic support. By imposing fear of a diminishing traditional family “between a man and a woman” and the dismissive character of violence against women, the government not only goes backward on the gender policy but also restricts the freedom of assembly and media (Krizsan and Roggeband 2018; Grzebalska 2022; 2022).

The transnational anti-NGO legislation pushes further on the conventional family values and imagined traditions. The National Security of Kyrgyzstan published a video with sex worker women in November 2023 with their personal information and gave a task to city and regional officials to get rid of “dens” [приют] in 15 hours (Uraliyev 2023). It is, therefore, a clear representation of the discursive production of state control over women’s bodies and their role as “mothers of the nation” (Butler 2004; Aksenova 2019). Thus, by adapting the Russian discourse on traditional values, those in power normalize the “radical right discourse of knowledge” through the rejection of feminism and the LGBT+ community (Băluță 2023).

According to internal communication, one of the only two LGBT+ organizations in Kyrgyzstan will cease their operations by July 2024. This, in turn, limits the scope of assistance and opportunities in terms of educational training, reproductive health, advocacy on various platforms, and security for the LGBT+ community. Representatives of this NGO refer not only to this law but also the one “On Media” (O SMI) which states that any information on media about non-traditional and non-heteronormative family traditions, will be banned. The government justifies it, thus instrumentalizing it, as a way to “protect children” from non-desired information to keep the traditional values. The yearly audit

provisions also put organizations under a burden, which could be used to support the community and those in need the most.

The legislation goes further on the protection of children's health, usually framed as the State's most important value, banning the media materials "denying family and traditional social values, promoting non-traditional sexual relations..."<sup>3</sup> (Băluță 2023; Jorokulova 2014). Most importantly, whilst those in power, point the narrative outward, gender activists "exposed" to the West, and seeking to protect "vulnerable" women from allegedly deviant ideas vis-a-vis Kyrgyz norms, the number of women, victims of domestic violence, prevailed over 10,000, with the enactment and validation of gendered ethno-nationalist re-traditionalization (Biybosunov and Zhunusova 2023; Suyarkulova 2016). Instead of solving the pressing issues, the government is endeavoring to exert complete control over or eradicate foreign influence and enhance the funding to Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs), which disseminate propaganda promoting "traditional" Kyrgyz family and values. Two government-organized entities, namely the Council of Elder Men and "Kurultai," already have the authority to propose changes in legislation.

## *WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?*

### *Conceptual Reorganization:*

- Rethink feminist strategies on engaging with the state and non-state anti-gender actors
- As civil society mobility is shrinking, use the same language, close and clear to the targeted people to side with women's rights activists

### *International Accountability:*

- Get more pressure from economic international organizations like the World Bank, and IMF and put a conditionality on their funds/grants to sustain the pre-2020 gender rights and freedom of media, freedom of association, and assembly.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111229?cl=ru-ru#st\\_2\\_1](http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/111229?cl=ru-ru#st_2_1)



- Hold the government accountable to international conventions like the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW

*Local Laws through International Perspective:*

- Kyrgyzstan needs to adopt a stricter law on gender-based and family-based violence. Right now, family-based violence is considered civil disobedience. It needs to be criminalized and the punishment needs to be severe. Kazakhstan has recently criminalized gender-based violence, and other countries should follow the example. Additionally, the conceptualization of gender-based violence should include the multiple and intersecting forms of violence against the LGBT+ community.
- Same-sex relationships need to be de-criminalized. Starting in 2012, Russia started adopting laws against the LGBT community, and non-governmental organizations and framed terrorism. Around the same time, geopolitical and economic factors connected well with the post-Soviet space, especially Kyrgyzstan as a small proxy country in Central Asia. Therefore, this discourse on anti-NGO and anti-rights has been ongoing in discourse and attempted to be adopted since 2013, too. Last year, the adoption of the anti-NGO law was delayed on purpose—partially due to the resistance of the civil society, but its primary purpose was to weaken the civic space—spreading terror and imprisoning independent media and opposition members.

*Regional Activism:*

- Create a Central Asian coalition of women's rights organizations. There is a Central Eurasian Feminist Coalition as a platform to be expanded and reinforced and an institution to be funded more solidly.
- Actors in democracy, human rights, lawyers, feminists, academics, and LGBT+ activists in the region should unite and create coalitions and stay connected to monitor, report, strategize, and respond to anti-gender movements. This should be kept in mind with the movements all around the world.

- Share the expertise. Knowledge production is under attack and the space, both civic and physical, is shrinking and securitized. If Kyrgyzstan

*International Activism through Coalitions:*

- Create or reinforce the transnational solidarity of civil society. Outright International is my internship organization for Spring 2024. It is the secretariat for the UN LGBT informal Core Group, it advocates for the rights transnationally for LGBTI+ rights. Apart from the UNHQ advocacy, Outright is a co-convenor of the two Caucuses: SOGI (sexual orientation, gender identity) and WRC (Women's Rights Caucus).
- They entail up to 300 organizations and individuals committed to the cause of gender equality and diversity. While the most active time is around the Commission on the Status of Women in NYC, most of the organizations work on local grassroots advocacy, monitor news, share information, and mobilize together against anti-rights organizations.
- The biggest problem I observed was funding. Anti-rights organizations are well-funded and well-connected. They press on child protection, anti-abortion, traditional binary family, and strict binary values through religious institutions. Organizations working on women's rights, reproductive health, and gender minority advocates need more funding from international, supranational, and multinational organizations. Organizations need funding for advocacy as well as grassroots anti-gender resistance, strategizing, and mobilizing. However, it should be set, not to blur with the neoliberal narrative as anti-gender and anti-right organizations, as well as those which penetrated the government, are set well and appeal to segments of the society simplistically.
- Take up the space and continue the resistance. For that, some unusual connections might be needed. Gender resistance is not binary but in a spectrum. There are conservative organizations, leaning toward similar values. Outreach and partnership

are needed to translate the same message and work against the anti-gender movements.

- Reclaim the human rights language. Anti-rights activists are easy to hijack the language, and talk about gender equality as women's emancipation and economic leverage development, but in a traditional family way. They protect the family and blame LGBT+ people as a threat to moral values and children being adopted. They frame it as a national security attack and convey the message using modern technology and social media campaigns.

#### *PERSONAL IS POLITICAL:*

So, I started with the social media attack on my self-expression and general existence in all spaces. And I want to finish by personal note, too, as the “foreign agents” law touches upon my ability to work or be accepted in my country. On top of the limiting ability for me to get employed and do advocacy in local NGOs with foreign funding operations which are limited, controlled, and policed, I need to grapple with my problems of being queer in an authoritarian-leaning country with a conservative society. But the thing that bothers me the most is my family, particularly my mother, and their (non-)acceptance of my queerness as gender and sexuality.

On April 26, 2024, we had a general call with my mom. Then she asked what kind of red skirt I was wearing. I told her it's not a skirt, it's wide shorts and the dividing lines are not visible. Then she saw me wearing a sparkling necklace and criticized me for that. Thus, this is the multi-layered fight vulnerable communities need to go through while fighting for decent life conditions. It's a fight with ourselves, constant re-organization of family values and communication, and a wider resistance against the anti-gender movement in the regions and the world. Women, gender minorities, and the organizations providing support for them are now under the big threat of being the most vulnerable to changes in our legislation. The

fight, however, is still ongoing. I hope one day I can just live my life freely, feel safe, and be supported.

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