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PRESS RELEASE

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Kyrgyzstan: all prisoners forced to shave beards

In Kyrgyzstan's prisons the prisoners are being forced to shave beards.

Recently, in a penal colony №3 of the State Penitentiary Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (SPS) (located in the village of Novo-Pokrovka of the Chui region) the prisoners began to face demands to shave beards. Soon after, the same information began to come out of the detention facility №5 located in the city of Osh. Now this practice has spread into the remaining institutions the SPS.

Anyone who refuses to comply with the new requirement forcibly shaved off his facial hair and hair on his head. Many are placed in solitary confinement as a punishment and deprived of family visits and food parcels. Such disciplinary measures apply to all prisoners regardless of religion and beard length. According to official figures, 182 out of 100 thousand people in Kyrgyzstan are imprisoned.

Back in October 2015, at prison №50 located in the village of Nizhniy Nooruz of the Chui region, prisoners voluntarily shaved off their beards, in order not to attract the attention of employees of operational services. It started immediately after the escape of nine prisoners, including seven sentenced to life imprisonment. When escaping, the prisoners killed three employees of the pre-trial detention facility, who tried to stop them. By shaving their beards, the prisoners hoped to avoid the suspicion of having links with those who escaped. Now, this has led to an unofficial ban on beards in all prisons.

Clerical Office of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan has not commented on the practice of the ban on beards.

Association for Human Rights in Central Asia calls on Kyrgyzstan to respect the fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the basic principles of the treatment of prisoners:

- **Respect for them;**
- **Observance of the principle of presumption of innocence;**
- **Ensuring freedom of religion and worship and ceremonies, etc.**