



Annual Report

2019



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About Central Asia Solidarity Groups

Central Asia Solidarity Groups is a politically and religiously independent non-profit organization. Our mission is to promote a democratic Central Asia, with a strong, active and inclusive civil society ensuring that human rights are protected and social justice is achieved. Central Asia Solidarity Groups seeks to accomplish these goals through long term solidarity work, training, exchanges and advocacy in the thematic areas of:

1. **Democratic Youth Organizing**
2. **Gender**
3. **Conflict Transformation**
4. **Climate and environment.**

Our geographical focus is on Central Asia, a region comprised of the five post-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In addition to our work in Central Asia, we run several projects in Sweden and Russia.

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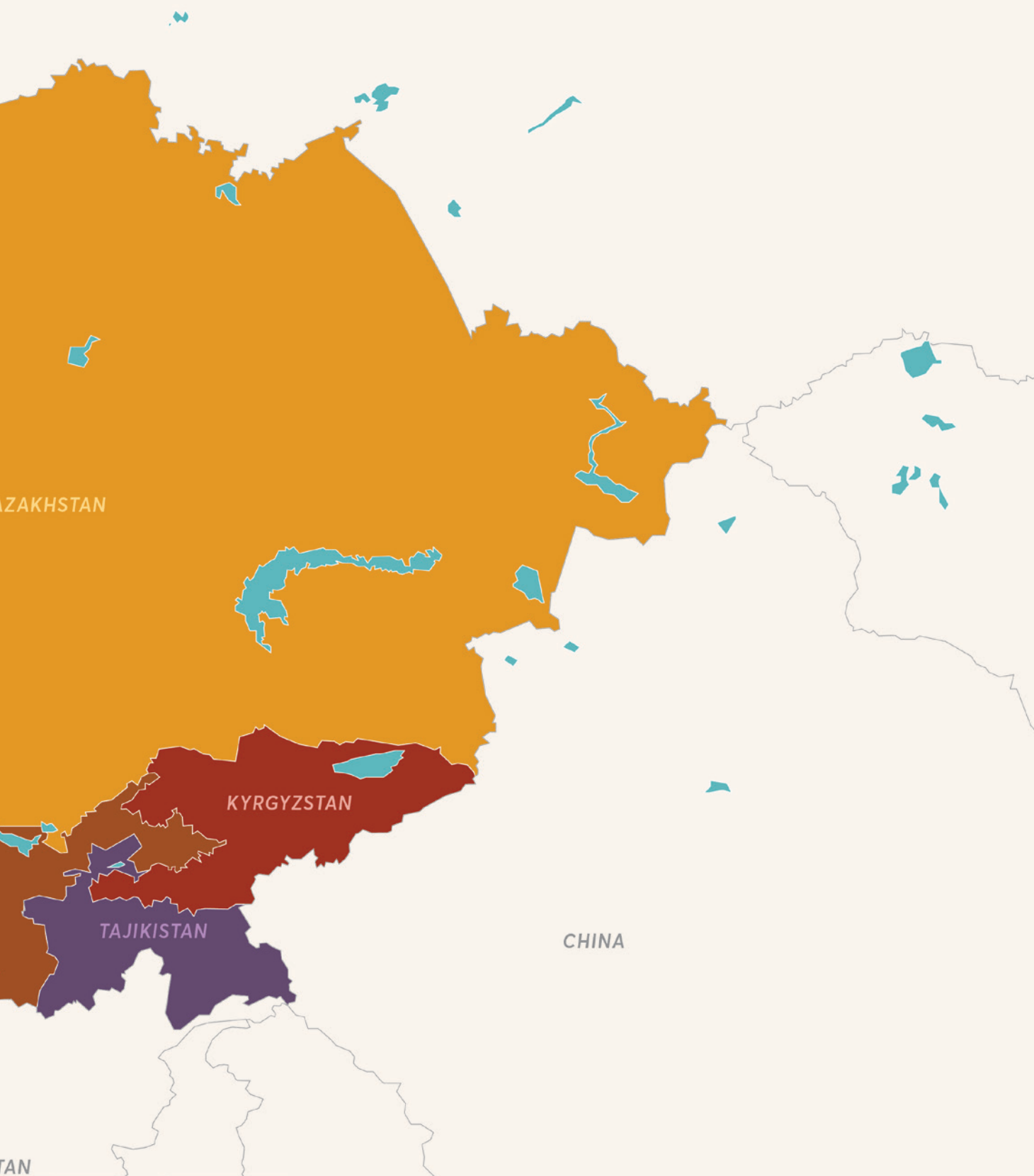
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Central Asia





Management

The board

In 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups' board convened for ten protocolled meetings at various locations across Sweden. In addition to these meetings, the board met in Malmö on July 25th for a strategy session to discuss long-term organizational and thematic priorities. Over the year, members of the board also convened in smaller groups to manage ongoing projects and to initiate new ones. This year, several board members visited our projects and partners in Central Asia.

During Central Asia Solidarity Groups' board meetings in 2018, six strategic goals were set for the upcoming five years of the organization's activity up until the Annual Meeting in 2023.

The board chose to prioritize three areas in 2019: an increased internal capacity, applying a theory of change in CAG's work. Financial stability is another area of focus for the organization, as CAG will now focus more on receiving consistent funding from grants and donors rather than primarily operating on a project-to-project budget. Most importantly, CAG did not only increase its engagement with ecological sustainability issues during this year, but also accepted the establishment of the environment as a new Thematic Program Area (TPA). In addition, CAG decided to declare a climate emergency and mobilize based on four proposed actions: articulating environmental concerns as a new TPA, launching activities and partnerships based on this new TPA, the induction of climate concerns to mainstream discussion, and knowledge building.



Over the past fiscal year, the board has consisted of the following people:

Johan Blomqvist, chairperson
Aida Akhmedova, vice chairperson
Gustaf Sörnmo, treasurer
Lola Matmusaeva, board member
Alexandra Cruz, board member (resigned)
Ildana Ruzybayeva, board member
Habira Majieva, board member
Gustaf Sörnmo and **Alexandra Cruz** have been authorized signatories.
Maria Jönsson has been the auditor.
The nominating committee has consisted of Josefin Åström and Filippa Almlund.

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting took place on April 6, 2019 at Sofielunds Folkets Hus Rolfsgatan 16, Malmö.

The Extra Annual meeting was on January 3, 2020. This meeting bid farewell to Alexandra, while a new board member and auditor were elected. Viktor Romanov and Maria Jönsson were elected, respectively.

Members

As of December 31st, 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups had 76 members.

Organization

Organization and Offices

In 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups continued to develop a democratic organizational structure that is sufficiently robust to be able to carry out large-scale projects, while at the same time being receptive to new initiatives, collaborations and endeavors. In addition to the board and the Malmö office team, Central Asia Solidarity Groups presently has several committees as well as a number of thematically oriented working and project groups. Central Asia Solidarity Groups has no geographically-fixed local branches, and the above-mentioned groups are not tied to specific locations. Our main geographic areas of activity in Sweden are Malmö/Lund, Stockholm and to some extent, Göteborg.

Over the past year, a total of nine staff members worked at the main office in Malmö. These included administrators, project managers, EVS-volunteers, interns and participants of short-term residencies. The office staff has included Gustaf Sörnmo, Viktor Romanov, Eira Fallen, Lola Matmusaeva, Ainagul Amatbekova, Talgat Subanaliev, Josefin Åström and Mehrubon Pulodi. The work carried out at the office has varied, and has included project management, evaluation, administration, budgeting, and the writing of grant applications. In addition, the office has worked to organize lectures, study circles, exchanges, study trips and other local events.



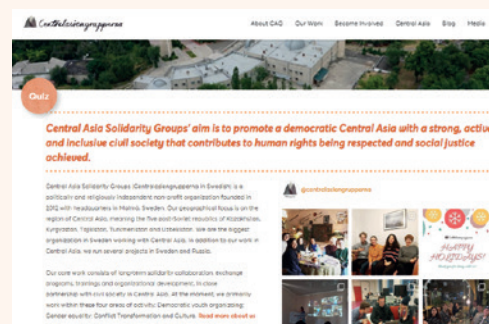
Internal Trainings

Over the past year, the board and office team partook in several training sessions aimed at strengthening organizational capacity, improving specific skills and developing new methods for training, quality control and evaluation. Central Asia Solidarity Groups organized training days and courses for staff and members, covering topics such as digital security, anti-corruption, mental health and burn-out prevention in the civil society sector.

Webpage and Social Media

The website of Central Asia Solidarity Groups functions as a hub for analysis of, advocacy for, and information about Central Asia and our work regarding the region. In addition to that, various events were promoted on our social media

platforms on Facebook and Instagram, such as Central Asia Days, lectures and study circles. The total amount of followers on CAG's Facebook and Instagram pages add up to more than 1,300, and the number of website visits equaled 17,777 in 2019.



Five years at CAG:

Interview by
Talgat Subanaliev

“ I saw CAG develop over the years from initiative-based to a more institutionalized organization. ”

This year, Viktor Romanov celebrates his fifth year with CAG – a milestone for him as well as for the organization. First coming to the organization as a volunteer and later becoming information coordinator, Viktor shares his experiences and journey at CAG: what he has learnt, his views on civil society and how the organization has developed over these years.

“I came to CAG as a volunteer five years ago. I witnessed how CAG has evolved and became more institutionalized, sustainable and developed its own strategy and established working mechanisms”, shared Viktor during an hour long interview-fika.

Today, Viktor is no longer that recently-graduated volunteer – now he is an experienced coordinator of the office. He also coordinates one of the main projects of CAG – the information project that aims to raise awareness about Central Asia as a region in Sweden. To him, this project is like his child; he created it from scratch, with continuous help and advice from colleagues and board members, invested himself into it and now proudly observes how it is coming to life.

“I work as an information coordinator at CAG. My main role at the moment is raising awareness about Central Asia in Sweden in many different ways. I also contribute to other projects that aim to promote cooperation civil society in Central Asia. My role at CAG is more of a coordinator; I try to ensure that all of our events, which we plan for a year or two in advance, are performed in the proper order. I also spend a lot of time planning the future events” says Viktor.

Since CAG is a small organization and is dependant to a large extent on external funding, it makes its office staff must be quite fluid. Remaining in the organization for such a long period might seem to be pure luck. However, Viktor’s long tenure is not only based on luck, but mostly on his hard work and devotion to the organization. His background in Political Science (with a degree in the field from the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), research, and previous work experience

in Kyrgyzstan’s civil society armed him with the theoretical knowledge and certain set of skills that fit like a glove to his work at CAG. It gave him the opportunity to grasp what CAG is at its core.

“I feel grateful that I have been with CAG for five years. Remaining in the organization this long I fully realized what CAG is – inside and out. I know how it works. I know its advantages and challenges. I know how to work with those challenges and how to respond to different situations. I understand the tendencies of our board and office – what we do and how we do it. I understand what we want to do and achieve both in Central Asia and Sweden. Or at least I think I know. We are a small organization but with big ambitions. I’ve learnt to navigate through the nuances of the work; my experience at the organization helps me move forward”, expresses Viktor.

Viktor is very passionate about working with civil society. He realized the importance of it while he was a second-year student. Robert Putnam’s “Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy” inspired him and had an immense impact on Viktor, making him think about the big question: “What makes democracy work?”. It also helped him coin his own understanding and views of what civil society is and its utmost importance for communities. From that moment, he realized that civil society is something that he wanted to explore. Later on, he even dedicated his thesis research to this topic in pursuit of earning his bachelor’s degree. Albeit, Viktor wasn’t very positive about the conclusions of his research. However, it didn’t push him away – rather it motivated him to continue to study the field further; what and how everything happens, and how one can bring positive changes to their community. Despite his research and work experience in civil society, Viktor is still in search for an answer as to what makes everything work.

“The question can be debated and answered in many different ways. Tones of books and reports have been written on this regard, but nowhere else have I found ‘THE Answer’, but I am convinced that CAG’s approach to work with civil society does make a difference and brings positive changes.”

“

I strongly believe that CAG is a lot about its mission that is to promote democratic Central Asia with a strong, active and inclusive civil society that contributes to human rights being respected and social justice achieved.

”

Working at CAG, not only helped to gradually change Viktor's views on civil society, but also it helped him to expand his knowledge - to gain a regional perspective of civil society in Central Asia, learn its nuances and establish new contacts.

"My views and understanding of civil society have changed because of CAG, this change was neither positive nor negative, I got a different perspective, but I am most positive that civil society, whatever the definition is, is the only recipe to bring positive changes."

Besides the shift in perspective, at CAG, Viktor acquired a very unique work experience that is peculiar to Sweden. Coming from a country with strict hierarchy; from a university where competition is a matter of survival; it took him a while to adjust to horizontal structure and flat hierarchy of working in Sweden. Everyone in the organization is equal, each opinion counts, and each can influence the group's decision making - and by extension, the organization itself. Viktor sees a flat hierarchy as an advantage that definitely "boosts the overall productivity and work-satisfaction... there's also an expectation of what needs to be done and the trust that one will do their best".

Viktor also explored work ethics at CAG that are based on principles of equality, justice, and non-discrimination. He met and continuously worked with people who are "responsible and self-driven professionals, but at the same time they are warm, sympathetic, understanding and supportive... All the work one does and the efforts one puts in are appreciated."

It's impressive to observe how CAG has developed since 2012. Beginning as an initiative group formed in Sweden by a few Swedes, inspired by their trip to Central Asia, the group first set out as their mission to contribute to democracy, human rights and civil society in Central Asia. Now, the organization has evolved into a full-fledged thriving organization with partnerships established in several countries. Many projects have been implemented, exchanges have been done and goals have been achieved. However, sometimes it might be confusing to people unfamiliar with CAG's work to draw the link between Sweden and Central Asia, as both seem to drastically differ from each other. Viktor ventures to explain the mission of CAG and the vision for the future:

"The answer would be the same as to why other organizations exist. All involved in the organization might have different answers. I strongly believe that CAG is a lot about its mission that is to promote democratic Central Asia with a strong, active and inclusive civil society that contributes to human rights being respected and social justice achieved. CAG is also a platform for civil society both in Central Asia and Sweden serving as a bridge, bringing like-minded people together. We accentuate on working with grassroot organizations. Moreover, Sweden and each country in Central Asia, individually, can learn a lot from each other. The process is always two-sided. I see a lot of examples that people from Sweden, namely youth workers and activists, learn from activists in Central Asia and vice versa. It's all about different perspectives on challenges. Yes, sometimes it seems that we live in two different worlds, and this prevents people from seeing different perspectives.

When one brings other perspectives to both Central Asia and Sweden, one promotes transnational cooperation, exchange of experience and best practices. These processes lead to establishment of friendships, promote international cooperation, which contributes to the creation of common vision and mission", shared Viktor.

Despite the differences, the world is at present more interconnected as a whole than ever before. Therefore, exchange of knowledge, best practices and promotion of international cooperation are vital both for Sweden and Central Asia. CAG will keep growing and serve as a bridge between these countries.

Partners

Central Asia Solidarity Groups collaborates with dozens of organizations spread across Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia. At present, the following are our primary partners:

Novi Ritm

Novi Ritm, founded in 2014, is an organization by and for young people. The group's foremost area of activity is in the city of Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan, where they run an office and a social coffee shop. The organization functions as a platform for youth with a variety of backgrounds to explore and discuss social issues, to develop ideas and implement their own projects. The organization's vision is a society in which young people work together to create a just, equal and sustainable world. The organization conducts its activities in the form of lectures, workshops, campaigns and camps through non-formal education for youth in the fields of: human rights, gender equality, environmental justice, social entrepreneurship and conflict prevention.



Children of St Petersburg (CSP)



Children of St. Petersburg, founded in 2012, is a non-governmental volunteer organization founded with the aim of providing free Russian language courses to the children of labor migrants from Central Asia. The group assists children with integration into Russian society and helps prepare them to enter school in their new home. At the moment, CSP provides Russian language courses and school preparation classes in one youth center and 11 city libraries. Besides the language and academic support, cultural events such as museum and theater visits, sightseeing, and summer/winter camps are also organized. Over the past eight

years, CSP, together with "Gul", a team of young women from Central Asia, have initiated publication of Gul journal in four languages. The intended audience of this journal is primarily migrants, and it provides information regarding the daily life necessities of migrants living and working abroad. In addition, CSP has been organizing winter and summer camps for kids. These interactive camps serve not only as entertainment, but also aim to provide education and assist with integration. Since its foundation, CSP has welcomed more than 1,300 children who have taken the organization's classes on a regular basis.

Nazik Kyz



Nazik Kyz, founded in 2008, is an activist group of women with disabilities in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Their work is based on empowering girls and women with disabilities in their daily struggle with inaccessibility and discrimination. They support individuals and provide education through their annual summer camps, where participants from all over Kyrgyzstan meet to share their experiences and learn about their rights as well as discuss issues linked to body positivism. Additionally, Nazik Kyz is actively involved in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and was also part of the demonstration in Bishkek calling for the ratification of the UN Convention on the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Bishkek Feminist Initiatives (BFI)



Based in the country's capital, BFI is Kyrgyzstan's first feminist activist platform, and was founded in March 2009. Through campaigns, activism, cultural promotion, peaceful civil disobedience and cross-movement solidarity, BFI aims to promote feminist values and actively challenge all forms of oppression and discrimination. BFI is part of a broad regional network of feminist groups, organizations and initiatives, and currently functions as a hub for the Central Asian feminist movement. BFI starts key initiatives to spread knowledge on feminist practices and issues, supporting local justice causes.

Democratic youth organizing

Context

The countries of Central Asia are generally categorized as hierarchical societies in which citizens and civil society have little influence on the political system. Marked by age-based hierarchies, the societies of the region grant little voice to young people, and decisions that affect young people and their futures rarely embrace the perspectives of the youth. For the last five years independent voices in Central Asia have been forced to deal with increased repression as a result of continued pressure from authorities. Civil society groups face restrictions imposed in the name of law and order, and their work has been increasingly stigmatized and criminalized. The existence of better opportunities for civil society organizations has a direct correlation with the health and quality of a democracy.

As an example, in Kyrgyzstan – a country generally depicted as a democratic oasis in comparison to its neighbors – there are several factors that severely limit young people's ability to actively and meaningfully participate in civil society. Because of persistent state corruption, as well as a lack of knowledge and advocacy channels, the youth of Kyrgyzstan experience difficulties in being able to exert influence on their life situation as well as claim their human and democratic rights. Although there are several youth organizations active in the country, their effectiveness is hampered by the stiff hierarchical structures upon which the country's society still largely operates.

What we did during the year



Solidarity projects with Novi Ritm

Securing the right to rights of youth in southern Kyrgyzstan

Central Asia Solidarity Groups and Novi Ritm work together on a joint project aimed at reducing discriminatory norms in Kyrgyzstan - particularly in the southern region, where these norms are often most prevalent. The goal of the work is to ensure that young people in the city of Osh and its surroundings have their rights acknowledged and respected not just on paper, but also in practice. The project is primarily focused on gender equality, women's and girls' rights, conflict prevention/transformation, youth activism and networking with decision makers such as local authority, police, some governmental universities, public schools, crisis centers and other civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives. Novi Ritm's target groups within the project are youth aged 14 - 28. Among them are young women, teenage girls, school teachers, young police officers, and university students from the departments of law, sociology, international relations and theology.

So far, Novi Ritm has implemented two networking meetings, the aim of which was to exchange practices and find common solutions to common human rights violation problems. Also, two thematic camps were organized together with old volunteers and current members of the organization. The first one was dedicated to young girls coming from three different districts: Osh, Batken and Jalal-Abad. Through educating them about their rights as humans and as women, the camp built their leadership potential in order to empower them to be socially and politically active. Another camp was arranged for young people who were selected to be a part of the Street Law program. This camp aimed to educate school, college and university students from conservative environments about practical law through interactive methods. Participants of the camp, and potentially of the program, had a chance to learn about human rights, democracy, gender equality and non-violent methods of resolving conflict. By the end of the camp, participants, together with a project team, created an action plan with clear steps as to what they learned from their experiences at the camp, and how they will use what they've learned after returning home.

In addition, Novi Ritm, in the framework of this common project, has also launched free juridical and psychological consultations for girls and women. Consultations are held on a weekly basis and are completely anonymous to protect the safety of the patients. These consultations, held with a lawyer and a psychologist, are done at the Novi Ritm coffee shop, office or any other location of their choosing.



Capacity building workshops

Non-formal education

A representative of our Polish partner organization KobieTY, conducted interactive three-day workshops on non-formal education in Kyrgyzstan. Teachers, youth leaders and activist representatives from southern Kyrgyzstan's youth organizations learned about non-formal education, self-development by engaging in a wide range of interactive exercises and group-work. A total of 23 people participated in these workshops. During these workshops the participants were taught to think critically, and to be more aware of and understand situations faced by people from various marginalized groups.



Sexual reproductive and health rights

The training aimed to share information about sexual and reproductive rights with young people from southern Kyrgyzstan. Natasha Wrang from Sweden, a board member of RFSU and a participant at the gender group study visit, led an interactive workshop on sexuality, safe sex, health and sexual orientation for more than 20 participants from the Novi Ritm staff, volunteers and activists.

Since sex is a taboo topic in Kyrgyzstan, it is rarely discussed in schools and home, and thus the topics discussed were new for many youth that participated. Following the workshop, the participants acknowledged the relevance and importance of the workshop for them, and expressed an interest in continuing to learn more about the topic.



Community outreach and mobilization activities



Three networking meetings were organized in the southern region of Kyrgyzstan within a larger project, 'Youth Agents for Change - Combating Discrimination Based on Gender Age and Ethnicity', in which youth and teachers took part. These meetings aimed to inform participants about issues related to discrimination based on gender, age and ethnicity in a participatory and non-formal manner. In total, meetings were attended by 57 participants and were dedicated to discussions around gender, how gender is a social construct, differences between biological sex and gender, stereotypes around different genders, non-formal education methods, human rights, discrimination based on ethnicity and how these issues affect the lives of people on different levels. Networking meetings also helped young people understand concepts of hierarchy, how young people are affected by it and how one can tackle social issues in their communities. In addition, four workshops were organized for more than 90 participants. The workshops were dedicated to non-formal and informal education methods, different techniques that are used in various discriminatory situations in daily lives, human rights, gender equality, and principles of non-discrimination.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250)

In the autumn of 2018, Central Asia Solidarity Groups implemented a project financed by the Folke Bernadotte Academy. The project was titled Regional Capacity Building Initiative within Youth, Peace and Security in Central Asia. The aim of this project was twofold: first to increase the capacity of Central Asia Solidarity Groups when it comes to the United Nations Security Resolution 2250, and secondly to foster regional connections by giving a voice to the work being conducted by, as well as spreading best practices of, youth-led organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The project included a trip to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It concluded with the publication of Youth, Peace and Security: youth activism in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which has been published in both English and Russian. This Central Asia Solidarity Groups' first production of a Russian-language publication. The publication includes the work of nine organizations, an overview of the UNSCR 2250, as well as a list of recommendations.



YOUTH, PEACE & SECURITY
Youth Activism in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan



Gender equality

Context

Common across all Central Asian countries are the variety of restrictions placed upon women and girls. Gender hierarchies permeate all aspects of society, including family structures. This manifests itself in widespread violence against women and harsh gender norms which saturate and structure daily life. Even though several of the countries in the region have ratified the *Convention of Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* and the Beijing Declaration, women continue to be discriminated against both in public and in private. It is not uncommon for young girls to be pressured into marrying a stranger, or to be kidnapped and then forced to marry the abductor. For many, marriage at a young age forecloses educational and professional opportunities later in life.

In Kyrgyzstan, where Central Asia Solidarity Groups has several years of experience working with local women's rights activists, violence against women has not only increased but also become normalized and more widely accepted. Around 30% of women in Kyrgyzstan, and nearly 20% of women in Kazakhstan, have reported that they have experienced some form of gender-based violence. This rate is highest in Tajikistan, where 58.2% of women have been victims of gender violence. While there is no official data available on gender-based violence in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, reports suggest that the problem continues to be a problem in these countries as well. In all countries, the actual figures are expected to be higher based on the limited data and the suspicion that many instances of gender-based violence are underreported.

In Central Asia, independent women's movements are not welcomed by the state officials. Furthermore, such movements are blamed for the introduction of so-called "Westernized values" and thus encroaching on the traditional values of Central Asian society. Vocabulary containing domestic violence protection, non-discrimination and gender topics are included on the list of such "Westernized values", and are thus condemned for being perceived as breaking more traditional principles of the country. The government has also introduced a number of legislative acts to control the work of independent NGOs.

What we did during the year

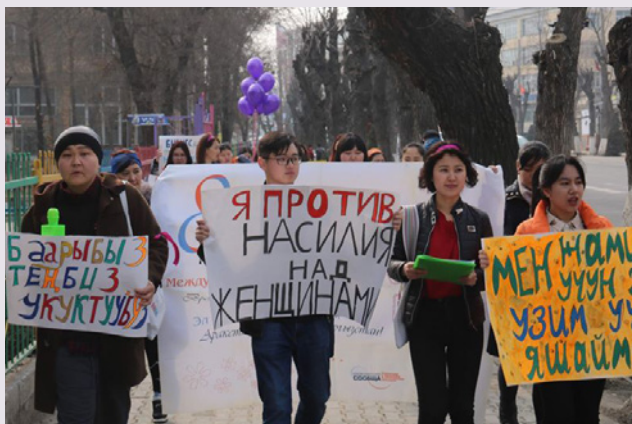


International Women's Day in Osh

On the 8th of March, Novi Ritm members, alongside Bishkek Feminist Initiatives, and together with local youth, organized the 3rd annual peaceful demonstrations dedicated to the International Women's Day, in Osh city. Arranging these demonstrations proved to be challenging due to resistance from ethno-nationalist groups, such as "Kyrk Choro". These groups strongly opposed the demonstrations, which were held in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek. Some organizers, and their friends who were supporting the idea of the event, received threats on social media and were attacked physically. Based on these events, it was deemed risky for Novi Ritm members to hold demonstrations in Osh, a city which is even more conservative, traditional and religious. In fact, Novi Ritm was warned by some representatives of the local authority and the police to cancel the event, but local youth demanded their constitutional rights to arrange and participate freely in these peaceful demonstrations. As a result,

demonstrations, as well as an exhibition, were arranged with the support of local youth, authorities, police, media channels, and representatives of some other civil society organizations. More than 50 people gathered to raise issues about women's and girls' rights, particularly about domestic violence, bride kidnapping, sexual assault and reproductive health. By the end of the demonstrations, local young people had learned about existing gender issues and about the work of Novi Ritm and were interested in the events of the organization, including feminist talks and feminist movie screenings.

The event was held within the joint project of Central Asia Solidarity Groups and Novi Ritm focused on reducing the level of discriminatory norms in Kyrgyzstan – particularly in the southern region, where these norms are often most prevalent. The project is supported by Forum Syd.



Guzal Goes to School coloring book

Central Asia Solidarity Groups, together with our partner organization Children of Saint Petersburg, have finalized a joint project titled "Children's Rights through Art" in August, 2019. The goal of this project was the creation of a comic book which would feature the story of Guzal, a young girl who has migrated with her family from Central Asia to Russia. In the book, Guzal struggles with (and eventually overcomes) gender-based stereotypes, and difficulties with the Russian school enrollment procedure, which impede her ability to go to school. After several exchange visits and numerous capacity-building activities that aimed to enhance the skills and knowledge of the "Gul" team to work with comics and design, the comic/coloring book was finally published. Titled *Guzal Goes to School*, the book was finalized in May. It has since been distributed online in Russia, Sweden, Kyrgyzstan and Poland. Two thousand hard copies were printed and handed out to children and families with migrational backgrounds in St Petersburg. The coloring book was also used during Children of Saint Petersburg's annual summer camp which involved around 130 children in different activities.



Events during the 16-days of activism against gender-based violence

Members and volunteers of Novi Ritm, together with volunteers, initiated an awareness raising campaign named "Love or Control" that was inspired by the global campaign, *16 days of activism against gender based violence*. The campaign included several activities including a youth conference in which invited speakers delivered speeches on the importance of civic activism, participation and involvement in solving socially important issues such as gender-based violence. Some other activities held by Novi Ritm include a crowdfunding campaign for one of the few functioning crisis centers for women and girls who were victims of violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. Currently, the center "Ak-Jurok" doesn't have any projects and is at the stage of closing its shelter where they host victims of violence and their children. Accordingly, Novi Ritm tried to support with raising awareness about their work, talking about the needs of its stakeholders and searching for financial support from the community members. Moreover, discussions on reproductive health, masculinity norms, legislations against gender-based violence and quiz nights about the 16 days for local youth were arranged.

The campaign was financially supported within Central Asia Solidarity Groups and Novi Ritm's joint project - *Youth Agents for Change - Combating Discrimination based on gender, age and ethnicity*.



Feminist Festival

One of larger events in Sweden that is held on annual basis - Feminist Festival - took place from October 11th to the 12th of this year in the city of Malmö. Central Asia Solidarity Groups were present at the information table this year. The Festival served as a great platform for our organization to raise awareness among locals and guests about our work, as well as providing information about Central Asia as a region, and, to some extent, Russia as well. At the same time, during the festival there was an opportunity to meet other civil society organizations, initiative groups and individuals working at local, national and international levels; to name few: RFSU, Amnesty International and Feminist Initiative.

Gender group study circle



During the spring of 2019, a study circle was organized for students and professionals interested in gender issues in Central Asia. The study circle aimed to offer an introduction to the region through the perspective of gender. It involved 21 participants from Sweden and other European countries. A total of seven meetings were conducted. Each meeting lasted for two hours and covered the context and gender-related issues in one Central Asian country. The first meeting offered a general overview of the region and the last meeting was dedicated to concluding discussions on the region's gender challenges separately and in relation to participants' experiences in other contexts. The participants were exposed to various news, reports, movies and podcasts on Central Asia that allowed for fruitful discussions to take place during the meetings. The lectures were delivered by scholars and activists with direct experience in the region. After the completion of the study circle, the participants reported an increase in acquired knowledge about the region.



“ Human Rights Defenders in Kyrgyzstan face many challenges. Among them, I would like to emphasize the pressure from governmental authorities when defenders demand the rights of other people.



”

Interview by
Ainagul Amatbekova

I had the great honor of talking to one of the most active human rights defenders of Kyrgyzstan, Muhayo Abdurapova. Muhayo is based in the southern region of the country, in the city of Osh. Currently, she works at the organization named “Positive Dialogue” that was founded by her and some of her colleagues in 2011.

The organization supports marginalized groups, such as HIV-positive individuals, the LGBT+ community, and women. According to Muhayo, one of the main challenges vulnerable groups face is being detained by police officers illegally. The police often don't follow the proper procedure; they are instructed to make sure that people who are arrested are made aware of their constitutional rights, but this doesn't happen in practice. Moreover, some of the police officers violate the rights of the people who are accused. In many cases, people, especially women, are violated both psychologically and physically.

Are there any success stories your organization has and you would like to share them?

Well, we have many court cases that ended in victory, but there is a very important one you might like to know about. I wouldn't call it a success story, because this was not what our team was expecting. But still, it was something revolutionary in the women's rights movement in Kyrgyzstan, especially in a conservative city like Osh. There was a case of a woman who killed a man to defend herself after that person tried to rape her. Despite the argument that she was forced to act to protect herself from violence, the woman was about to be sentenced to

Why did you decide to create a human rights organization?

Before coming up with the idea of running my own human rights organization, I worked for some other civil society organizations and was providing local citizens with free consultations. I mostly worked on cases of land division, divorces, and domestic violence. Unfortunately, our consultations were arranged within projects that had to end, but the problems women were facing were not even close to concluding. Most of those women couldn't afford to hire proper lawyers and advocates. I knew the situation and I was trying my best to support them, especially the ones who come from low-income families. So on top of my job responsibilities, I was also representing women pro bono. But I was alone. Later I had the idea to build an organization that would defend the rights of women and girls for free. Right now we are the only organization in Osh that works with the cases related to women and girls' rights for free.

20 to 25 years in prison, under the charge of “murder”, but we convinced the judge and the relatives of the deceased man to change the charges from “murder” to an “act of self-defense” (with a sentence of 5 years in prison). Ideally, we wanted a woman to be released since she wasn't aiming to kill a person - she was just defending herself and her dignity. But we couldn't make it. Our judicial system has once again proven that it is not equal and just towards each and every one of us.

What are the main challenges human rights defenders face in Kyrgyzstan?

Human Rights Defenders in Kyrgyzstan face many challenges. Among them, I would like to emphasize the pressure from governmental authorities when defenders demand the rights of other people. There is also a high level of hate towards not only individual human rights defenders but the non-governmental sector in general. Why? Because we are associated with foreign agents, or the ones who just do things for the sake of getting grants but have no real social impact. We also get attacked by nationalistic, patriarchal groups such as "Kyrk Choro", members of which think that we promote Western values that are not relevant to the Kyrgyz culture, which is based on traditional values and conservatism. Accordingly, some Kyrgyz society members believe what "Kyrk Choro" says and start disliking civil/human rights defenders. For example, I was attacked two times from the society members' side because I was protecting the rights of a woman who was considered as a "slut" in the community.

How can the civic sector help resolve those challenges? For instance, in what way does your organization fight against human rights violations?

The civic sector is really strong and influential in Kyrgyzstan. We are good at reacting to the things we are not satisfied with. Recently, we have started a huge anti-corruption campaign in the country which was initiated by well-known activists who were able to mobilize more than 500 people (during the first peaceful protest), and 1000 people (during the second peaceful protest). But most of the protests are being arranged in the capital city of Bishkek. When it comes to Osh – the second largest city, which is more conservative, religious and traditional – some civil society organizations are doing great work, but citizens themselves aren't active when it comes to protests. It is more difficult to mobilize them for peaceful protests and demonstrations because people are simply afraid of any kind of provocations – especially provocations regarding ethnic minorities, in my point of view.

“ We will keep doing what we stand for: eliminating discrimination towards women and girls by making juridical consultations more accessible for women. ”

What is the role of youth in promoting human rights values in Kyrgyzstan?

Our organization works with youth organizations. We support them, we try to share our knowledge, experiences, practices and expertise with them. While talking about the role of young people in promoting human rights values, we also need to highlight that there are only a few young lawyers, especially the ones who work with the issues of gender-based violence towards women and girls. This is a pity indeed!

What are the plans of your organization for the future?

We will keep doing what we stand for: eliminating discrimination towards women and girls by making juridical consultations more accessible for women – for women from remote areas of the country, specifically. Since we want to engage more young people in our work, we are also thinking to start a program for students of Juridical Faculties of different universities that will give them the opportunity to obtain practical knowledge which will increase their interest in working with marginalized groups.

What keeps you motivated to do what you do?

The whole system keeps disappointing me because it has set many obstacles for us, human rights defenders and our stakeholders. For instance, there is a high rate of corruption in the judicial system which causes an increased level of injustice. Yes, it is hard to deal with injustice. But what keeps me motivated and inspired to do what I do is people – especially women I have been fighting for. They are the ones who always appreciate my efforts, and they are the ones who learn to defend their rights and stand for justice while spending time with me. When I see minor progress in the mindsets and behavior of people I work with, when I see them being more determined, demanding and grateful, I realize that what I do means something, and it is worth moving forward. The other reason could be my family. After years of experience, my family became used to my work schedule (for example, I spend very little time with my child) and they know that sometimes I have to take risks to protect others. It still keeps my parents worried about me and my security, especially after some of the attacks I faced previously. But still, the support I receive from my dad and mom and my little daughter who always stays proud of who I am and what I do is incredible. In such moments I stay encouraged and empowered to keep supporting women and girls.

Conflict *transformation*

Context

Central Asia Solidarity Groups has been working with this thematic area in a wider sense since 2010; dealing with issues from interpersonal conflicts to structural oppression. Our efforts in this line of our work has been primarily focused on southern Kyrgyzstan, a region which has been marked by several conflicts. In June of 2010, the city of Osh was the epicenter for a large-scale political and ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks which left hundreds dead. These events are still fresh in the memories of the locals, as many lost family members, friends, and their homes. Osh has become a more segregated city in which groups often avoid one another. In these conditions, stereotypes and hate flourish. Border disputes with neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are also a recurring feature in southern Kyrgyzstan. Other examples

of conflicts are the marginalization of other minority groups based on ethnicity, religion and sexuality. These problems are expressed through structural discrimination in the labor market, religious extremism, nationalist hate groups, and segregated media spreading xenophobic propaganda.

Central Asia Solidarity Groups has chosen to work in close proximity to local organizations in southern Kyrgyzstan. This has included providing financial support to their outreach-oriented work aimed at preventing such issues, but also providing training in non-violence and supporting projects and organizational development aimed at creating more inclusive and democratic organizations while reducing conflict and fragmentation.

What we did during the year



Vardagen Civilkurage - CAG's partner in Conflict transformation

Vardagens Civilkurage is one of the main partners of CAG in Conflict transformation. VC has had great experience in training youth and young adults in conflict intervention and develops extensive methodological material for training in this field. The project, which is now in its second year of three, targets young people and focuses on concretely exercising techniques of conflict transformation.

In 2019, to strengthen the partnership between Novi Ritm and Central Asia Solidarity Groups, the Swedish-based organization conducted training sessions in Kyrgyzstan on everyday civil courage, as part of the capacity building phase of a larger project, *Youth Agents for Change – Combating Discrimination Based on Gender, Age and Ethnicity*. This also allowed for an exchange of experiences, skills and knowledge in conflict transformation. Three regions in the south (Jalal-Abad, Batken and Osh) were involved in the project to promote youth participation, youth mobility and policy dialogue on the regional and international level.

Using an interactive blend of methods featuring workshops, lectures, role play and group work

Best youth project of 2019

In December 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups received the Årets Guldorn award from the Swedish Inheritance Fund for the best youth project in 2019. The award was given for our three-year project, Vardagens Civilkurage (2015-2018), which, among other things, resulted in the formalization of the youth organization with the same name, local chapters in six different Swedish cities, over 250 training sessions and workshops, and a book on nonviolent everyday resistance called *Ingrid! - handbok i vardagligt civilkurage*.



Vardagens civilkurage team trained 20 representatives of different CSOs, Novi Ritm members and school teachers on how to act in conflict situations and how to effectively intervene. To showcase the practical application of the civil courage concept, role play and other exercise techniques of civil courage for different situations were simulated. A small handbook, called *Intervene for justice!*, was distributed, which discussed themes regarding civil courage. This was done in order that the participants can conduct trainings on related themes in the future on their own, through peer-to-peer learning.

After the training, based on the feedback, participants demonstrated confidence in understanding the basics of civil courage, incorporating the skills and knowledge gained in their work and daily life and in further sharing it with their peers. Novi Ritm will involve participants as trainers in future workshops that are planned to be held in the regions.

Over the years, CAG collaborated with Vardagen Civilkurage and Novi Ritm to share experiences and best practices on how to practice civil courage in daily life.



Climate and environment

Context

The global ecological crisis is the greatest existential threat to humankind, but also to many other species, life forms and ecosystems. Climate change has already had a significant negative impact on the region of Central Asia. According to GLZ, the region is suffering from the consequences of climate change more than most other regions of the world. It is predicted that the expansion of deserts and arid areas will continue; a grim statement, considering they already make up 80 percent of the total territory of Central Asia. On top of that, above-average increases in temperature combined with water shortages

and extreme weather events are also being frequently observed. A continued business-as-usual approach to the ecological crisis could lead to a Central Asia, that, within decades, will be much less hospitable to human communities, potentially leaving many areas uninhabitable. At this moment, regional security and economic growth remain at the spotlight of the region's political discourse, while the growing threat of climate change is largely being overlooked or ignored.

What we did during the year



New thematic program area

In 2019 the board decided to create a new thematic program area centered around climate, environment and ecology. The reason for this decision was, of course, the severity and urgency of the ecological crisis and, more specifically, the very negative impacts of climate change on the Central Asian region. Based on extensive research, board members, Ildana Ruzybayeva and Gustaf Sörnmo, developed our publication *Climate Change in Central Asia: history, current trends and adaptation*, which will guide the future work of Central Asia Solidarity Groups in this thematic area. Additionally, we are building new partnerships and collaborations in Central Asia and Russia with actors working in this thematic field in various ways; for example, local struggles for environmental protection and justice, climate justice activists, youth strikers, ecofeminist groups, environmental lawyers and initiatives working with ecosystem restoration. In 2020, we plan to launch several major projects on environment and climate.

Declaration of climate emergency

Central Asia Solidarity Groups co-founded a campaign at the end of 2019 that calls for civil society to declare a climate emergency and mobilize their resources to contribute to the transition to more ecologically resilient societies and communities. Obviously, this declaration can imply many different things depending on the niche of the participating organization. For Central Asia Solidarity Groups it entails developing new projects and partnerships in Central Asia around various ecological issues; support environmental activists in the region; mainstreaming a climate-oriented perspective in the organization and our activities; building internal

skills and knowledge; radicalizing our environmental policies, and much more. The campaign recognizes the failure of the political and corporate spheres to do anything meaningful about reducing greenhouse emissions and stopping the global destruction of ecosystems. Instead, civil society should lead the way and “prefigure” the kind of society we need. The campaign will formally be launched in January 2020 and will initially include organizations such as Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Sweden, Vardagens Civilkurage and Forma with the ambition of involving many other civil society actors.



Climate activist residence in Osh

For two weeks in December, a group of members and staff of Novi Ritm met daily to participate in workshops about climate change and climate activism. The residence was coordinated and facilitated by Central Asia Solidarity Groups, through activist Eva Beal. The workshops focused on gaining a deeper understanding of what the climate crisis is and why it's happening, from both scientific and socio-economic perspectives. Additionally, workshops looked at the impact the crisis is having on individual, community, societal and global levels, and why some communities are being impacted more drastically than others. In one of the workshops, time was provided for reflection on participants' own connections to nature, how they've experienced the climate changing in their

own lifetimes, and how that has impacted them. The workshops culminated in a conversation about how to take action on local environmental issues, such as air pollution, trash and plastics pollution, and low water levels, and how these issues are connected to solutions to the global climate crisis. Learning about young climate activists and movements from around the world provided inspiration for the participants. One day was spent out in the city documenting local issues and collecting plastics, experimenting with repurposing plastics to see what kind of products could be made. After the training, participants felt more informed, understood that their actions can make a difference, and felt excited to continue with ideas that came up during the workshops.



New methods and approaches on masculinities and ecology

We have collaborated with Chalmers University and MÄN (Men for Gender Equality) during 2019, developing a new methodology on the intersections of destructive masculinity norms and ecology. Dominant social constructions of masculinity are problematic from multiple ecological perspectives, and the methodological material aims to create spaces for alternative constructions and expressions of masculinities, primarily among men. The material is currently being pilot tested in Sweden and in 2020 it will be used in Russia and Central Asia. Central Asia Solidarity Groups will coordinate the implementation of the method among three partner organizations in Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

Trainings on climate conversations in Sweden

Our close partner and ally, Vardagens Civilkurage, has since 2018 conducted many workshops and training sessions related to the ecological crisis. These sessions are practical and interactive – often using methods such as role playing and forum theater – and revolves around everyday life situations, such as how to create constructive climate conversation with family and friends and how to intervene in climate denialism, apathy and greenwashing. They can also be oriented toward more activist-related topics such as nonviolent campaigning and civil disobedience. Central Asia Solidarity Groups has participated and contributed to several of these trainings, and also to the methodology development. Much of the material can be found at the website Klimatprata: www.klimatprata.se

Information and advocacy work

Context

Over the past six years, Central Asia Solidarity Groups has increasingly focused on information and advocacy work. The organization strives to represent and amplify Central Asian grassroots, civil society and marginalized voices towards the Swedish public and decision-makers. In doing so, CAG aims to introduce perspectives that are rarely included at the higher levels of the political processes. Information and advocacy work includes, but is not limited to, touring exhibition, role play days, theme days, Central Asia Days, lectures, and explainer clips.

We strive to establish contacts with universities, decision-makers, and international organizations. Within our information and advocacy work, we have focused on the pressing issue of climate change in Central Asia. As a result, we have updated and expanded our exhibition and included civil society organization that work with the issue, invited experts to Central Asia Days, raised the issue of climate change during the hearing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as dedicated one of our clips to climate change in Central Asia.

*What we did
during the year*



Round Table Discussion on Central Asia: Critical analyses of contemporary challenges

At the end of May, Central Asia Solidarity Groups, in partnership with Forum Syd's The Swedish Civil Society Network for Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia, organized round table discussions with journalists and policy makers on Central Asia in Stockholm. The event aimed to provide a platform for Central Asian journalists and researchers to share their experiences and analysis of the developments in their respective countries as well as in the region. Specially invited guest speakers were Khayrullo Mirsaidov, a human rights activist and journalist from Tajikistan who has been sentenced in absentia; Venera Djumataeva, acting Central

Asian Regional Director at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Humayra Bakhtiyar, Human Rights journalist from Tajikistan; and a researcher from Uzbekistan whose identity we refrain to disclose due to security reasons. Guests shared their personal experiences of being jailed, tortured and persecuted as well as general tendencies of how regional governments limit the freedom of expression and violate other human rights in their countries of origin. The round table discussion became a platform to exchange knowledge from multilateral perspectives and possibilities about how Central Asia and Sweden can cooperate in this regard.



Activism, Civil Society and Rights Based Work in Central Asia exhibition

Our exhibition on activism, civil society and rights-based work in Central Asia was updated and expanded this year. It continued its tour in Sweden and highlighted 28 organizations from the four countries that comprise Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The organizations represented in the exhibition work that presented themes including women's rights, youth, the LGBTQ+ community, freedom of expression, art, migration, and environment. In 2019, the exhibition was installed in Stockholm, Linköping, and Falkenberg. The exhibition will continue its tour in Sweden in 2020.



Central Asia Days 2019

On the 24th and 25th of November, Central Asia Solidarity Groups hosted the sixth annual Central Asia Days conference. This year's conference took place in Stockholm and consisted of a series of lectures with activists, civil society representatives and researchers from Central Asia and Europe that work closely with various issues related to Central Asia. The first day featured two lectures at ABF Stockholm. The first lecture, named "I Am Not Really a Feminist, But...: Conducting Feminist Research Among Young Women in Tajikistan" was led by Davlatbegim M. from Tajikistan, who is currently finishing her MA studies in Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany. The lecture was dedicated to a feminist research project in Tajikistan that focused on Davlatbegim's attempts to make fieldwork relations with her participants more equal and reciprocal. The second lecture, named "Civil Activists vs. State Non-Governmental Organizations: Prospects and Current Challenges" was held by Irina Matvienko, feminist activist and journalist, from Uzbekistan, who talked about the current situation of civil society, activists and state non-governmental organizations, while focusing on women's rights, defamation and smear campaigns against human rights defenders, as well as her work at the initiative "NeMolchi.UZ" that she founded in Uzbekistan.

The second day of the conference was held in the historic Grillska Huset building at Stortorget and consisted of four lectures. The first lecture, "Implications of Chinese Policy for Central Asia" was given by Julian Tucker, Junior Research Fellow and research coordinator at the Stockholm China Center of ISDP. This lecture focused on how China has sought to make the modern Silk Road an economic reality, what impacts Chinese policy has on Central Asian society and various other developments in the region. The second lecture, "Effectiveness of Peacebuilding Intervention in Kyrgyzstan and the Importance of Impact Evaluations in Development and Humanitarian Fields" was given by Anastasia Aladysheva, development economist and impact evaluation expert from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, Switzerland. She focused on peacebuilding interventions in Kyrgyzstan and impact evaluation work that she conducted

jointly with other researchers at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The third lecture, titled "Political Rights in Tajikistan: How Actors, Who Fight for Freedoms are Labeled Terrorist" was held by Humayra Bakhtiyar, an independent journalist and the chairperson of the organization "Journalists at Risk", who focused in her lecture about the principles of democracy and how they are frowned upon, and in many cases forbidden, in Tajikistan. The lecture also focused on the aftermath of the 2015 government's crackdown on civil society and independent journalists and what impact this had on civil society in Tajikistan. The fourth and final lecture, named "Violation of Human Rights to Clean Environment in Kazakhstan" was held by Sergey Kuratov, who is the chairperson of the Ecological Society Green Salvation based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He shed light on the situation of environmental and human rights in the country, where the former is determined by an economy that is oriented towards the exploitation of rich natural resources, primarily oil, coal and metals.



Hearing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Central Asia Solidarity Groups organized a hearing with researchers and civil society representatives from Central Asia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sweden. Our guest speakers provided up to date information about various developments such as women's rights, the rights of LGBTQ+ communities, environmental situations persecution of journalists, etc. The hearing provided an opportunity to establish contacts and network with decision-makers in these thematic areas.

Video clip on climate change in Central Asia

In our effort to raise awareness about Central Asia and the environmental challenges that the region faces, Central Asia Solidarity Groups have produced a video clip dedicated to climate challenges in Central Asia. The clip is based on the research conducted by board members and draws attention to major impacts that climate has on the region. Among other things, it concluded that agriculture and livestock, water resources, health, biodiversity, and the energy sector are severely affected by climate change in Central Asia. Moreover, the Central Asian region is suffering more from the consequences of climate change than are most other regions of the world. It is predicted that the expansion of deserts and arid areas will continue, while such terrain already make up 80 percent of the total territory of Central Asia. The video clip is one in a series that we are dedicated to current developments in Central Asia, such as freedom of assembly, women's rights, regimes and authoritarian tendencies, and spreading awareness of this part of the globe.

Human Rights Days

In November, Central Asian Solidarity Groups participated in the largest human rights event of its kind in the whole Scandinavia - Forum for Human Rights - that took place in Linköping. During this three-day event, alongside other civil society organizations and government agencies, Central Asia Solidarity Groups held its information stand in the exhibition square to present the organization and inform the Swedish public about Central Asia. During the Human Rights Days, Central Asia Solidarity Groups used the momentum to promote the Role-Play, an online make-a-choice quest to show the LGBTQ+ situation in Central Asia, specifically in Kyrgyzstan, and raise awareness about the issue.



Through an interactive game the players learnt about what's it like to be an LGBTQ+ person in Kyrgyzstan by choosing a path as a main character in the game. The players were impressed and engaged as the game let them experience decision-making and challenges as an LGBTQ+ person, as well as potential consequences of their actions.

Ayka movie screening

As part of the information and advocacy efforts in Sweden, Central Asia Solidarity Groups have screened the film, *Ayka* (in Kyrgyz, "my little one") in Malmö. Shown in November the movie depicts the life of a young Kyrgyz woman who migrates to Russia in search of work. The movie shows the challenges that migrant women face in Russia: abuse of power by employers, discrimination, gender-based violence, sexual abuse and lack of protection from criminal organizations. Since Central Asia Solidarity Groups works with young women and children who have migrated from Central Asia to Russia, the movie was shown with the aim of creating an understanding of the realities that women from Central Asia face in Russia. The movie was well-received and attracted more than 80 people.



Gender group study circle and their projects



Following the spring study circle, some participants completed local projects which were connected to Central Asia and gender issues. In total, seven projects were submitted in the format of a film screening, an article, a pub quiz, a brunch, a blog post, a compilation album and a documentary. For instance, two articles raising different challenges in Central Asia were published in FUF magazine. One was named "Stolen, Enslaved, Now My Wife" which presented and problematized the issue of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. The other article, titled "Building the Tallest Dam in the World", discussed the conflicts in the region stemming from the demand for water. More than 500 people were reached through these projects. All projects have been finalized except the documentary, which will be filmed in Kyrgyzstan in 2020.



THE SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT FORUM

In Kyrgyzstan, a girl is kidnapped every 40 minutes and forced into a marriage with her kidnapper. Now as #MeToo has spread around the globe, Kyrgyz women and girls are speaking out to end this practice.

Bride-kidnapping has had a long history in Kyrgyzstan and is still a prevalent marriage tradition. This is as it sounds. A man kidnaps an unmarried young woman, often from the streets, bundles her into a car and takes her to be his wife. To legitimize the criminal act the perpetrator generally asks an imam or other authoritative figures to conduct a wedding ceremony.

Once taken to the perpetrators family home, this situation gives the woman or girl two options. Either to remain in the forced union – most often exposed to sexual violence, exploited for her labor and become a victim of oppression for the rest of her wedded life. Or to escape at the risk of revenge violence from her kidnapper and face stigma and shame from her community and sometimes family for leaving the forced marriage. Both these options often position these girls and women at risk of much higher rates of suicide.

Despite harsher laws introduced in 2013, as an attempt to deter this cultural practice, it still takes place. The United Nations most recent reports state that 13.8% of women under the age of 24 are coerced into marriage in Kyrgyzstan. The failure for the Kyrgyzstan's government to protect women and girls from these kidnappings and uphold their rights is glaringly obvious.

A United Nations report from September 2018 found that the Kyrgyz state has 9-

“**Perpetrators remain unprosecuted and women's rights are continually threatened and violated**”

systematically failed to enforce existing laws criminalizing bride kidnapping. Kyrgyz-

Roleplay day



In the framework of the information project, Central Asia Solidarity Groups have created a roleplaying game. The goal behind this roleplaying game is to deepen one's knowledge about solidarity cooperation through the lens of Central Asia.

The participants, who include students, decision makers and the general Swedish and European public, are informed by this game about international solidarity work regarding Central Asia. This is accomplished through the use of regional case studies which presents players with background information about the topic, as well as problems and tasks that must be solved. Teams or individuals are assigned to be a representatives of a particular group, such as LGBT+, in a country that has hostile laws towards them. Players must put themselves in the shoes of their assigned group and come up with solutions for the given problems.

The methods used in a Roleplay Days enable deeper learning about development cooperation in Central Asia, cases of rights-based approaches, as well as the 2030 agenda points linked to democratization, gender and human rights. The first Roleplay Day was arranged in the city of Vaxjö on December 6, 2019 in collaboration with Globala Kronberg. There were more than 15 participants coming from various backgrounds. Besides immersing themselves into the situation of LGBT+ people in Kyrgyzstan, participants also learned about other issues in Central Asia Central Asia Solidarity Groups' activities conducted in Sweden, and partner organizations in Central Asia. Among all the questions, the most common ones were related to human rights, relationships among Central Asian states and overall geopolitics, especially the roles of China and Russia in the region.

Planning meeting with Eastern Partnership Network

Since the beginning of 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups have been part of the Swedish Civil Society Network for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia. This network creates an opportunity for us to learn about, and collaborate with other civil society organizations that work within similar thematic areas. In 2019, representatives from Central Asia Solidarity Groups participated in the activities organized by and for network members. Among them were capacity building training sessions on social and digital security, evaluation meetings and planning.

Nowruz

On November 23rd, Central Asia Solidarity Groups was part of the celebration of Nowruz in Stockholm, which was organized by the organization Abai for the fourth year now. The idea behind the holiday of Nowruz is to both welcome spring and the New Year, and also to promote friendship and understanding between people of different nationalities. Every year on this holiday, many guests of all ages, different nationalities and various interests gather together to celebrate the holiday. Friendship, mutual understanding and support are the main themes of Nowruz. This year, around 200 people took part in activities such as a movie screening, as well as an exhibition featuring traditional carpets, jewelry and souvenirs from Central Asia.

International exchanges and residencies

What we did during the year



Volunteers based in Sweden, Kyrgyzstan and Poland

At the end of May, Central Asia Solidarity Groups, in partnership with Forum Syd's The Swedish Civil Society Network for Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia, organized round table discussions with journalists and policy makers on Central Asia in Stockholm. The event aimed to provide a platform for Central Asian journalists and researchers to share their experiences and analysis of the developments in their respective countries as well as in the region. Specially invited guest speakers were Khayrullo Mirsaidov, a human rights activist and journalist from Tajikistan who has been sentenced in absentia; Venera Djumataeva, acting Central

Asian Regional Director at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Humayra Bakhtiyar, Human Rights journalist from Tajikistan; and a researcher from Uzbekistan whose identity we refrain to disclose due to security reasons. Guests shared their personal experiences of being jailed, tortured and persecuted as well as general tendencies of how regional governments limit the freedom of expression and violate other human rights in their countries of origin. The round table discussion became a platform to exchange knowledge from multilateral perspectives and possibilities about how Central Asia and Sweden can cooperate in this regard.

Mobility of youth workers in Sweden



Central Asia Solidarity Groups, together with Novi Ritm, and KobieTY, a partner organization in Poland, organized a mobility of youth workers together with civil society organizations working with youth in Sweden. The mobility took place between May 20th to the 26th in Malmö and Lund. The purpose of it was to exchange the best practices and experiences of organizations involved as well as to plan our further cooperation.



Within the framework of mobility of youth workers, participants were able to learn about organizations such as Yalla Trappan, FAMOUS, Kultur House (KOD), Ensamkommandes förbund, Men for Equality (MÄN), LGBT+ community of Malmö University. Participants also had the opportunity to mingle with representatives of youth workers, share experiences of activism, talk about the challenges faced by civil society organizations of three countries, and how these issues can be overcome.



Visit to Children of Saint Petersburg



For the past year, Central Asia Solidarity Groups and Children of St. Petersburg (CSP) have extensively collaborated to implement a joint project called "Children's Rights through Art", which has been funded by the Swedish Institute. As a follow-up to the project, in the beginning of June, Central Asia Solidarity Groups staff visited Children of St. Petersburg to evaluate the project's activities, preliminary results and discuss further possible collaboration. CSP shared their experience implementing the project and the challenges they faced during the process. The project has been successfully completed, with 2,000 copies of the coloring book having been published and disseminated. Central Asia Solidarity Groups and CSP agreed to further cooperate within a bigger project called "Collaborative Project" funded by the Swedish Institute.

Summer residency

From June 12th to June 27th of 2019, Central Asia Solidarity Groups had a summer residency in Malmö, Sweden and hosted its first summer resident with an activist background, from Tajikistan. An activist from Uzbekistan participated in the program online. The residency was focused on building long-term partnership with civil society representatives and activists coming from Central Asia by sharing knowledge, experiences and best practices in the thematic areas as gender equality, women's/ girl's rights, democratic leadership, anti-discrimination, inclusive organizing, rights of LGBT+ community and strengthening security practices.

Within the activity, the resident, EVS volunteers and the program coordinator participated in the sessions about the situation of gender equality in Sweden, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. More sessions were arranged on gender as a social construct, a rights based approach, a logical framework approach and the democratic technique of arranging meetings using non-formal methods and tools. By the end of the program, a resident, together with the EVS volunteers, developed their project aimed at solving gender based discrimination in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).



Exchange week in Kyrgyzstan

Active participants who attended the fall study circle on gender in Central Asia in 2018 were selected for a fully-funded study trip to Kyrgyzstan. The study trip took place between June 9 and June 16, 2019. The participants visited various feminist organisations in the capital of Bishkek and our main partner organization, Novi Ritm, in Osh. In Bishkek, they learned about the experience of a young woman who recites the Kyrgyz epic called Manas — traditionally male-dominated practice. Later, they met with the main organizer of the annual 8th of March demonstrations in Bishkek and had a chance to walk the same route as the protesters do every year. The participants also learned more about the work of Bishkek Feminist Initiatives. Later, they also attended a presentation by Nazik Kyz, an organization that promotes accessibility and equality, then learned about the creative activism methods used by the organization IDEA. The participants also had a chance to attend a lecture at the university on “Women in the Soviet vs Independent Kyrgyzstan”. In addition to all these meetings, the participants met up informally with more activists from different organisations who shared their experiences of activism in Kyrgyzstan. In the southern region of the country, they attended a workshop on everyday civil courage and learned more about the work of Novi Ritm and its new social coffee shop that gathers active youth of the city for hot beverages and other social events. The study trip participants got to not only meet organisations and individuals working with gender issues in Kyrgyzstan, but also explored its beautiful mountainous nature on the road trip from Bishkek to Osh.



Financial Report

Income statement

2019-01-01
2019-12-31

2018-01-01
2018-12-31

Operating incomes, changes in inventories etc.

Grants

3 082 882

3 233 320

Sum operating incomes, changes in inventories etc.

3 084 756

3 233 320

Operating costs

Development projects

-1 629 987

-2 409 990

Exchanges and trainings

-363 221

-483 691

Volunteering and activist residencies

-144 888

-22 007

Information and advocacy

-510 975

-449 922

Cultural projects

-39 289

-21 021

Other external costs

-78 245

-140 962

Sum operating costs

-2 766 605

-3 527 593

Operating profit

318 151

-294 273

Financial posts

Other incomes from interests and similar posts

1 874

—

Sum financial posts

—

—

Results after financial posts

318 151

-294 273

Results before tax

318 151

-294 273

Results of the year

318 151

-294 273

Balance sheet

2019-12-31

2018-12-31

Assets

Current assets

Current receivables

Other receivables

24 335

144 328

Deferred expenses and accrued incomes

–

–

Sum current receivables

24 335

144 328

Cash and bank balance

Cash and bank balance

785 048

1 662 034

Sum Cash and bank balance

785 048

1 662 034

Sum current assets

809 384

1 806 362

Sum assets

809 383

1 806 362

Equity and liabilities

Equity

Balanced profit or loss

325 590

619 863

Result of the year

318 151

-294 273

Sum equity

643 741

325 590

Current liabilities

Tax liabilities

26 016

43 631

Other liabilities

31 589

45 715

Accrued expenses and deferred income

108 037

1 391 426

Sum current liabilities

165 642

1 480 772

Sum equity and liabilities

809 383

1 806 362

All amounts in SEK

Acknowledgments

Individuals

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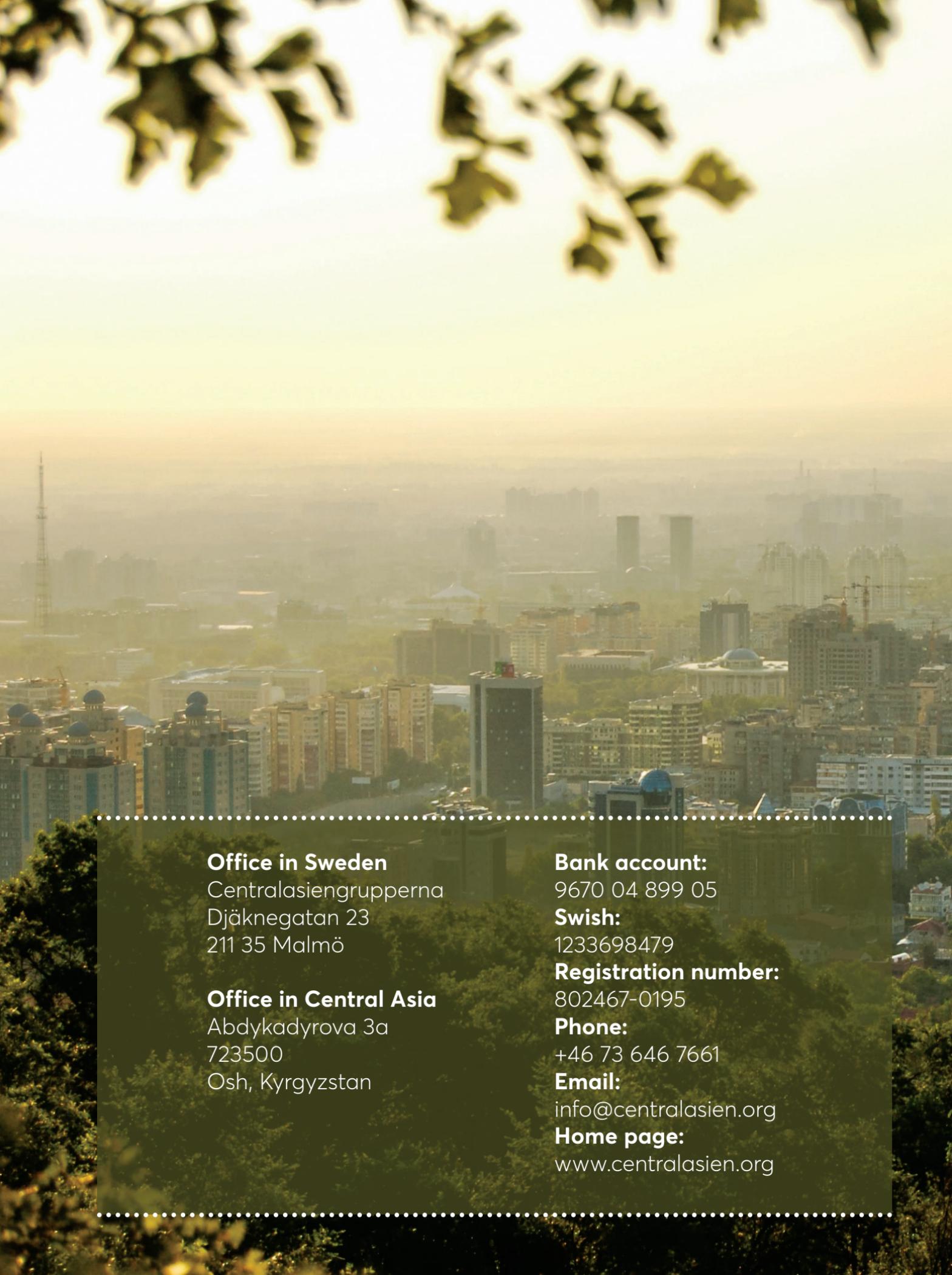
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An aerial photograph of a city, likely Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, taken from a high vantage point. The city is densely packed with buildings, including several tall, modern skyscrapers in the distance. The sky is a warm, hazy orange from the setting or rising sun. In the foreground, the silhouettes of trees and foliage are visible, framing the top and bottom of the image. A semi-transparent dark green box with a dotted border is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing contact information in white text.

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