

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ouzbekistan-dictator-s-daughter-loses-libel-01-07-2011,40307.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Uzbekistan

Justice rendered

"Dictator's daughter" loses libel suit against French news website

1 July 2011

Reporters Without Borders hails today's decision by a Paris court to reject the libel suit that Uzbek President Islam Karimov's daughter, Lola Karimova, brought against the French news website *Rue89* over an article describing her as a "dictator's daughter" who used charity events to try to "whitewash her country's image."

"This verdict was the logical outcome of a trial in which the plaintiff failed to prove that the article was defamatory," Reporters Without Borders said. "We nonetheless regret that the court did not accede to the defence lawyer's request to convict Karimova of bringing an improper lawsuit."

Karimova had demanded 30,000 euros in damages for the article by **Augustin Scalbert**, which was posted on the website in May 2010. In today's ruling, the court described the article as "entirely true to reality"

Two Uzbek women activists, Mutabar Tajibayeva and Nadejda Atayeva, testified eloquently to the court during the trial about the deplorable human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

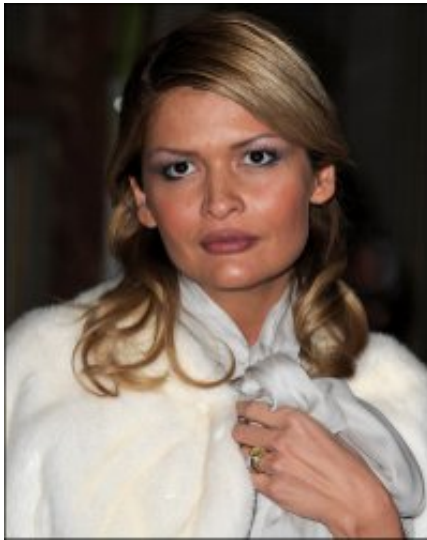
At least 11 journalists are currently detained in [Uzbekistan](#), which is ranked 163rd out of 178 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

18.05.2011-Lola Karimova, press freedom predator's daughter, suing French news website

A Paris court is due begin hearing a highly unusual libel suit against the French news website [Rue89](#) tomorrow. It has been brought by [Lola Karimova](#), the high-profile daughter of Uzbek President [Islam Karimov](#), over an article describing her as a "dictator's daughter" who was using charity events to try to "whitewash her country's image."

"The lawsuit would be laughable if the human rights and media freedom situation was not so disastrous in Uzbekistan," Reporters Without Borders said. "Lola Karimova would not have had to sue in order to silence an outspoken news outlet in her own country. Nor do the Uzbek courts offer the same judicial guarantees as those in France. The way despots and their relatives take advantage of the judicial system in democratic countries is outrageous."

The press freedom organization added: "This trial may nonetheless serve to turn the spotlight on this appalling dictatorship, which is too often forgotten. We will certainly use it to draw attention to the regime's disgraceful record on respect for media freedom, which has worsened even more in recent months."



Karimova is demanding 30,000 euros in damages from *Rue89* over an article by **Augustin Scalbert** on 20 May 2010 headlined "AIDS – Uzbekistan cracks down at home but puts on show at Cannes".

It reported that her elder sister, Gulnara, had co-hosted a "Cinema against AIDS" charity ball in Cannes, [while a young activist had just been given a seven-year jail sentence in Uzbekistan for distributing HIV-prevention leaflets deemed to be "contrary to the people's traditions."](#) As well as finding fault with the "dictator's daughter" label, the lawsuit also objects to the article's claim that the two sisters paid film actress Monica Bellucci to attend another charity event they organized. This was tantamount to accusing them of money laundering, the lawsuit suggested.

His daughter may find it uncomfortable, but Islam Karimov has crushed all opposition and used fear to rule Uzbekistan unchallenged since 1989. This makes him a "dictator" in the sense of the term used by political scientists. He is also on the list of ["Predators of Press Freedom"](#) that Reporters Without Borders updates every year on 3 May (World Press Freedom Day).

At least 11 journalists are currently detained in Uzbekistan in the most terrible conditions. The fall of several of Karimov's Arab counterparts has clearly increased his paranoia because harassment of the media stepped up since the start of the year. The Uzbek media now have to notify the authorities before meeting with foreign officials.

Independent journalists are constantly hounded. Two journalists working for a state-owned TV station, **Saodat Omonova** and **Malohat Eshankulova**, were [fired in December after demonstrating in a square in central Tashkent against censorship and corruption at the station](#). It was an unprecedented act of courage in a country where silence is golden. Two independent journalists, **Vassily Markov** and **Ruslan Karimov**, were arrested on 5 May while investigating the number of suicides in the southern province of Kashkadarya. Covering everyday life and social problems is a major challenge for Uzbek journalists.

Rue89

Censorship seems to know no limits and the Internet is not spared. The websites of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and the Russian newspaper *Ruski Reporter* recently joined the long list of sites that cannot be accessed inside Uzbekistan. Mobile phone Internet and communications, one of the last areas of freedom, were brought into line at the start of March, when operators were ordered to immediately report any mass distribution of SMS messages with a "suspect content." The authorities can order them to cut Internet access at any time.

The authorities fear nothing. They are not even afraid of looking stupid. A campaign was launched in the state media in March against rap and rock and roll, described as "satanic music" created by "diabolic forces" that are "advancing like dark clouds over the heads of Uzbek youth."

The sixth anniversary of a massacre in the eastern city of Andijan that left hundreds of dead was just five days ago, on 13 May. Many NGOs say that the human rights situation has worsened since 2006 and accuse the authorities of [large-scale violations](#). The opposition has been eliminated and human rights activists can no longer visit the country.

Despite many difficulties, Human Rights Watch managed to keep an office open in Tashkent for 15 years but [the government finally forced it to shut down the office in March](#). According to Human Rights Watch, [torture and ill-treatment are systematic in Uzbek detention centres](#).

Little reference was made to human rights during [the discreet visit that President Karimov made to Brussels on 14 January](#). Lola Karimova's lawsuit will hopefully help to end the international community's deafening silence about the widespread human rights violations in Uzbekistan.

For further information:

- [Read](#) our previous statements on Uzbekistan
- Read our 2011 report on ["Uzbekistan, Internet Enemy"](#)
- Read independent information about this country on [uznews.net](#) or [ferghana.ru](#)

(Picture: AFP)
