

# Supporters Say Convicted Kazakh Rights Activist Is Political Prisoner



Yevgeny Zhovtis appears in court.

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**ALMATY – Supporters of Yevgeny Zhovtis, the director of the International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law in Kazakhstan, have announced that they consider him a political prisoner, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The newly established Committee to Protect Yevgeny Zhovtis announced that it is confident that the recent verdict against Zhovtis verdict is illegal and politically motivated.**

Zhovtis on September 3 was convicted of manslaughter for striking and killing a pedestrian with his car on July 26. He was sentenced to four years in a labor camp.

According to the committee, the court "used the traffic accident to punish Zhovtis for his professional human rights activities." The committee urged Kazakh authorities to review the case and to annul the verdict, saying that international experts should be involved in the additional investigations.

On July 26, the day of the accident, tests showed no alcohol in Zhovtis's blood and technical experts concluded there was no way to avoid the collision.

Several days later, Kazakh authorities decided to conduct additional forensics tests. This time, they found alcohol in Zhovtis's blood and determined that he could have avoided the accident.

His lawyer, Vitaly Voronov, told RFE/RL that the judge repeatedly ignored the defendant's requests during the trial. He said he was certain that the text of Zhovtis' verdict had been printed beforehand, as the judge spent about half an hour writing up the decision and returned to the courtroom with the verdict printed on five pages.

Leaders of Kazakhstan's opposition parties and human rights organizations have joined the Committee to Protect Yevgeny Zhovtis, which is chaired by former political prisoner Sergei Duvanov.

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