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PRESS RELEASE

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The Tian Shan Policy Center (TSPC) of the American University of Central Asia is now launching a project on "Protecting the Rights of Kyrgyz Migrants" (2012-2014). Its purpose is to raise awareness and heighten the level of debate on the policy issues relevant to protecting Kyrgyz migrants and their families. With a grant from the Open Society Foundations Central Eurasia Project, the TSPC will conduct research and analysis, and disseminate findings of best practices and standards for consideration by policy-makers, international agencies, as well as NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic. It will facilitate more robust dialogue of reforms by convening stakeholder dialogue meetings. The TSPC anticipates that the Project can help strengthen the work of government, policy-makers, and NGOs.

Hundreds of thousands of people from Central Asian countries cross borders every year in search of a better life or to help their families. More than half of the 10 million migrants now working in Russia are from Central Asian countries, largely from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These labor migrants are particularly vulnerable to abuse. They often face exploitation, discrimination, violence, poor working conditions, and lack access to health care, pensions, and education. While many migrants participate in trans-border work programs and pay taxes in Russia, there are few legislative and institutional protections in either the sending or receiving countries to effectively protect their rights.

Many experts agree that there is a need to bring together the various stakeholder groups in Kyrgyzstan to consider deficits in the current policies and approaches related to Kyrgyz migrants working abroad, and to build consensus around the opportunities for more innovative approaches to reform based upon sound research and analysis. The Center's new Project is designed to engage critical dialogue and more concerted action by the human rights and labor groups, diaspora networks, progressive business leaders, and government allies that want to advance systematic reform in migrant protection in Central Asia and Russia.

To increase the tools available to advocates, the TSPC will also be creating a web-based platform for a new *migrant rights knowledge-management center*. This platform will allow the Project to collect and disseminate Central Asian specific data to advocates and policy-makers on demographic and social protection needs, key issues, laws, policies, programs, negotiations, and other reform activities. It will also identify the groups working on migrant rights issues in the region to enhance networks and information sharing.

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