

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER'S DETENTION EXTENDED

The pre-trial detention of Oyub Titiev, a prisoner of conscience and head of Russian human rights group Memorial, has been extended for a further two months, until 9 May. There has also been an increase in the number of attacks on Memorial offices and its employees, which are widely believed to be connected to the ongoing persecution of Oyub Titiev. Amnesty International believes this is part of a concerted, politically motivated attempt by the authorities to intimidate and silence human rights defenders in Russia.

On 6 March, the Staropromyslovsky District Court of the Chechen capital, Grozny, extended **Oyub Titiev's** pre-trial detention for a further two months, until 9 May. The District Court stated that if released, Oyub Titiev could abscond and might pose a threat to the judicial process by putting pressure on witnesses and destroying evidence. The prominent human rights defender, and head of the Russian NGO, Memorial, in Russia's Chechen Republic, was arrested on the morning of 9 January and held incommunicado for several hours. He remains in detention, falsely accused of drug possession. There are serious concerns that Oyub Titiev may be at risk of torture while in detention.

The pressure from the authorities on both Oyub Titiev's family and colleagues at Memorial has escalated in the past month. His family have on numerous occasions been harassed by the police and, as a result, forced to leave Chechnya. Meanwhile, his lawyer reported being followed by plain-clothed operatives. There have also been several attacks against Memorial's offices in the North Caucasus. On the night of 17 January, unidentified masked men set Memorial's office in the neighbouring Republic of Ingushetia on fire. On 19 January, police conducted a search of Memorial's office in Grozny. While it was reported that the search was conducted within the law, the Memorial staff fear that some further "evidence" found during the search (cigarette butts contaminated with an unknown substance) could have been planted to incriminate Oyub Titiev. On 22 January, a car, which had been used by Oyub Titiev's lawyer was set on fire outside the Memorial's office in Dagestan. Around the same time, staff members of Memorial's office in Dagestan reported receiving death threats on their phones. Amnesty International believes that these incidents were connected with the persecution of Oyub Titiev in Chechnya.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language calling on the Russian authorities to:

- Release Oyub Titiev immediately and unconditionally, and drop all charges against him;
- Pending his release, ensure that Oyub Titiev is protected from torture and ill-treatment;
- Conduct a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into both the circumstances that led to Oyub Titiev's arbitrary arrest and the attacks against Memorial offices and employees, ensuring anyone found responsible is held to account.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 APRIL 2018 TO:

President of the Russian Federation

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin
Ul. Ilyinka, 23
103132 Moscow,
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 9102134
Twitter: @KremlinRussia @KremlinRussia_E
Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7495 987 58 41/ +7495 692 17 25
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Prosecutor of the Chechen Republic
Sharpuddi Muaidovich Abdul-Kadyrov
Prosecutor's Office of the Chechen Republic
Ul. Idrisova d. 42,
Grozny, 36400
Chechen Republic, Russian Federation
Email: procurat-chech@mail.ru
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ALEXANDER VLADIMIROVICH YAKOVENKO, Embassy of Russia, 6-7 Kensington Palace Gardens, London, W8 4QP, 020 7229 6412

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 5/18. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/7702/2018/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 9 January Oyub Titiev was arrested and held incommunicado for several hours after his car has been stopped and searched on his way to work. The Ministry of Interior confirmed that Oyub Titiev was arrested after “approximately 180 grams of a substance with a specific marijuana odour” was found in his car during the search. Oyub Titiev denied the allegations and insisted that the drugs had been planted in his car. He stands accused under Article 228 of the Russian Criminal Code for unlawful possession of drug substances. If found guilty, he could face up to ten years in prison.

Oyub Titiev has been working in the Grozny office of Memorial for many years and has been threatened on numerous occasions in connection with his human rights work. He became Head of the office shortly after the murder of human rights defender and Memorial staff member, Natalia Estemirova in 2009. Following her killing, many of Memorial's staff members had to leave the country fearing for their lives, and Memorial had to suspend its work in Chechnya for five months.

For the last few months, Oyub Titiev together with other Memorial colleagues, were working on the case of 27 Chechens allegedly forcibly disappeared, and shot dead by the police on the night of 26 January 2017. Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta wrote extensively on this issue. Oyub Titiev's colleagues believe that his detention is an attempt by the authorities to stop him from doing his legitimate human rights work.

Further information on UA: 5/18 Index: EUR 46/8037/2018 Issue Date: 13 March 2018