

URGENT ACTION

LIBRARIAN'S TRIAL STARTED IN MOSCOW

Natalya Sharina's trial began on 2 November and if convicted, she will face up to ten years in prison. Natalya Sharina is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Natalya Sharina's trial has begun after the Moscow Prosecutor's Office submitted her case to the Moscow Meschanskiy Court on 7 October. At the first hearing on 2 November, Natalya Sharina declared that she understood, and pleaded not guilty, to the charge of "embezzlement on an especially large scale". For the charges of "inciting enmity or hatred with abuse of office" she said that it was unclear which of her actions violated the law.

Her lawyer further challenged the indictment by pointing out that there is no evidence in the case file that Sharina had "extremist intentions and anti-Russian sentiments". He went on to state that the embezzlement charges were unfounded as all the contracts in question had been approved by the higher level officials. Natalya Sharina's daughter told Amnesty International that many of her mother's former colleagues, and Library users, came to support her at the trial. The next hearing is planned for 23 November.

The defence team hoped that the Court would send Natalya Sharina's case back to the Prosecutor's Office, but on 21 October 2016 the Court rejected their request and ruled that the trial will go ahead. On the same date, the Court also extended her house arrest until 28 April 2017, but allowed Natalya Sharina to have daily walks in fresh air for two hours. This is a positive step, as her daughter has said that the sentence had negatively affected her mother's health and that she has not been allowed the access to the medical treatment she requires. Natalya Sharina has been under house arrest for a year without being allowed to leave her flat or communicate with the outside world apart from her lawyer and the close relatives she lives with.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to terminate unfounded criminal proceedings against Natalya Sharina;
- Calling on the Russian authorities to lift house arrest of Natalya Sharina immediately and unconditionally as she is a prisoner of conscience;
- Urging that Natalya Sharina should have an immediate access to the medical treatment she requires.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 DECEMBER 2016 TO:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation

Fax: +7 495 987 5841 / +7 495 692 1725

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Moscow City Prosecutor

Vladimir Victorovich Churikov
Moscow City Prosecutor's Office
Pl. Krestianskaia Zastava, dom 1
109147 Moscow
Russian Federation

Fax: +7 495 951 50 40

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

And copies to:

Human Rights Ombudsman of the Russian Federation

Tatiana Nikolaevna Moskalkova
ul. Miasnitskaia, 47
107084, Moscow

Russian Federation

Fax: +7 495 607 7470 / +7 495 607 3977

(to check if fax received: +7 495 607 1854)

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 third update of UA 261/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR46/4710/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Natalya Sharina has been working as a librarian since 1981 after having graduated from the faculty of philology of the Far East State University in Vladivostok. In 1986 she and her family moved to Moscow where she continued her work in various libraries. In 2006 she was appointed as the Director of the state-run Library of Ukrainian Literature in Moscow. She is charged with "inciting enmity or hatred with abuse of office" (Article 282, part 2(b) of the Russian Criminal Code— carrying punishment of up to five years in jail) and "embezzlement on an especially large scale" (Article 160, part 4 – punishment of up to ten years in jail).

The criminal case against Natalya Sharina was initiated in October 2015 following a complaint by a former employee of the library who had been dismissed in 2010. Natalya Sharina was initially charged under anti-extremism legislation for allegedly distributing printed materials with "anti-Russian and anti-Russian state propaganda" after the investigators allegedly found works by Ukrainian nationalist Dmitry Korchinsky in a pile of books that had not yet been indexed or made available to borrowers. Natalya Sharina denied these belonged to the library and claims they had been secretly planted there by some law enforcement officials. On 30 October 2015 she was put under house arrest.

On 5 April 2016, weeks before her house arrest due to expire, Natalya Sharina was charged with embezzlement for having that this charge is baseless, both because she paid her legal expenses using her own money, and because the library's lawyers were not even licensed to represent her in court.

According to Natalya Sharina's daughter, on 27 July, during a court hearing to prolong her detention, the judge asked Natalya Sharina why she was so unhappy about the house arrest adding that "I had [other] women prisoners here jumping with joy when they were given house arrest." The judge further remarked that "this time will be counted in anyway" towards Natalya Sharina's future sentence. This remark indicated to Natalya Sharina's family and supporters that the judge was biased and intent on convicting her.

On 15 August, the Moscow Prosecutor General's Office refused to sign the indictment against Natalya Sharina and the case was sent back for further investigation. There were hopes that this would be used as an opportunity to close down the case, however, it did not happen and the case went to court for a preliminary hearing on 21 October.

There are serious concerns about Natalya Sharina's health and access to adequate medical treatment. Natalya Sharina suffers from high blood pressure and not being able to walk in fresh air negatively affected her health even further. Her daughter also told Amnesty International that her mother must have an operation on her spine. For it to go ahead she needs access to her MRI scans which are being held in the Moscow Tagansky District court since 30 October 2015 when Natalya Sharina first applied for a permission to have walks. In June 2016 Natalya Sharina applied to the Court requesting the scans. However, the court secretary refused to give the scans to her on the grounds that "all staff is on leave". The family was still unable to obtain the scans.

Further information on UA: 261/15 Index: EUR 46/5101/2016 Issue Date: 4 November 2016