

URGENT ACTION

JAILED FOR PLAYING POKEMON GO IN CHURCH

Ruslan Sokolovsky, a 21-year-old law student and well-known atheist blogger from Yekaterinburg, Russia, is currently in pre-trial detention facing up to five years' imprisonment for a video he published showing himself playing Pokemon GO in a church. He is a prisoner of conscience.

On 11 August, **Ruslan Sokolovsky** published a video on YouTube in which he plays the mobile phone game "Pokemon GO" in one of the main churches in Yekaterinburg, the Urals. He intended to draw attention to the absurdity of legislation that criminalized offending believers' feelings in Russia. At the end of the video, Ruslan Sokolovsky states that he regrets not catching the rarest Pokemon, Jesus, and says: "they say he doesn't exist". The video was shown on federal television stations with the commentary that Ruslan Sokolovsky was insulting the feelings of believers and was possibly mentally ill.

On 19 August, the press secretary of the local Ministry of the Interior issued a statement that the Ministry's press office had "discovered" the blogger's video during their "web monitoring" and sent it for preliminary investigation to the police's Centre for Combating Extremism. In the early morning of 2 September, police officers entered Ruslan Sokolovsky's apartment while he was still asleep, after his landlord provided them with the keys. The officers arrested Ruslan Sokolovsky and searched his apartment, confiscating his video equipment and printed copies of a satirical magazine he was publishing. The blogger was charged under Article 282 ("inciting hatred or enmity and insulting human dignity") and Article 148 part 2 ("public actions expressing clear disrespect to society with the aim to insult religious feelings of believers committed in places for religious worship") of the Russian Criminal Code. These articles bear punishment of up to five years and up to three years in jail, respectively.

On 3 September, a judge of the Kirovsky District Court in Yekaterinburg remanded Ruslan Sokolovsky in custody for two months for the period of investigation. The court hearing was closed to journalists and members of the public. On 5 September, Ruslan Sokolovsky submitted an appeal against his arrest. Amnesty International believes that Ruslan Sokolovsky has been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the Russian authorities to release Ruslan Sokolovsky immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience who has been detained solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, and terminate the criminal proceedings against him;
- Urging them to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, including ideas and opinions that may be regarded as deeply offensive by some groups of the population.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

Head of the Investigation Committee for Sverdlovsk Region, Lieutenant-General
Valeriy Yurievich Zadorin
Ul.Schorsa, 18
Yekaterinburg, 620142
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 343 297 72 31
Salutation: Dear Head of the Investigation Committee for Sverdlovsk Region

Prosecutor of Sverdlovsk Region
Sergei Alexeevich Okhlopov
Sverdlovsk Region Prosecutor's Office
Ul. Moskovskaya, d. 21
Yekaterinburg
620014 GSP-1036
Fax: +7 (343) 377 0241
Email: sverdlobprokuratura@mail.ru
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

And copies 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

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Article 148 "Violation of the right to freedom of conscience and belief" was introduced into the Russian Criminal Code in 2013, following the trial of Pussy Riot group members charged with "hooliganism" for their performance in Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. The Article criminalized activities that "insult the feelings of believers". When such an "offence" is committed in places specially designated for worship, such "crime" carries a sentence of up to three years in jail. At least six individuals, all of them men, have stood trial in 2016 after being charged under this article, . In one case, the court hearing has been suspended. Four of these individuals have been convicted and received non-custodial sentences, and one has been sentenced to forcible psychiatric treatment.

Pokemon GO is a free location-based augmented reality game developed for iOS and Android devices. One of the main purposes of the game is "to catch" a virtual Pocket Monster (Pokemon). It was released in July 2016 and attracted cores of fans across the world "catching" Pokemons in the streets, on beaches and in other public spaces.

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