

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST FACES PRISON FOR RADIO COMMENT

Journalist Svetlana Prokopyeva is facing criminal charges of “justification of terrorism”, punishable by seven years in prison, for her comment on a local radio station in Pskov, north-western Russia, made on 8 November 2018. She criticised the government and expressed her views on why youth are radicalized. The charges against Svetlana Prokopyeva stem solely from her exercise of her right to freedom of expression and should be dropped.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation
Igor Viktorovich Krasnov
Ul. Bolshaya Dmitrovka, 15A
Moscow, GSP-3
125993
Russian Federation
Online form: <https://en.sledcom.ru/reception>
<https://twitter.com/Genproc>
<https://www.facebook.com/genprocrf>
<https://www.instagram.com/genprocrf>

Dear Prosecutor General,

I am concerned about the prosecution of journalist **Svetlana Prokopyeva** for “justification of terrorism”. The charges against her stem from a comment she made at a radio station in Pskov in relation to the recent suicide bombing at the Federal Security Service (FSB) office in Arkhangelsk committed by a local young man.

Svetlana Prokopyeva was discussing the reasons behind radicalization of the youth and expressed her view that it was linked to the crackdown on criticism and peaceful protest by the Russian authorities. She did not call for, or condoned, violence and instead urged the authorities to respect human rights and the rule of law. The criminal charges brought against her in response to her comments are totally unfounded. The Prosecutor’s Office of Pskov Oblast approved her indictment on 16 March, and her trial will begin soon.

No-one should be prosecuted for peacefully expressing their opinions or criticising the authorities. Criminal prosecution of Svetlana Prokopyeva is a clear violation of her right to freedom of expression.

I therefore call on you to ensure that charges against Svetlana Prokopyeva are dropped and the unfounded criminal proceedings against her are terminated.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Svetlana Prokopyeva works at Radio Liberty and cooperates with other media outlets, including the Echo of Moscow radio station in Pskov. On 8 November 2018 she appeared on the Echo of Moscow speaking about the suicide bombing that had been committed the previous week by 17-year-old boy Mikhail Zhlobitsky in Arkhangelsk. He had detonated an explosive device at the regional headquarters of the Federal Security Service killing himself and injuring three officers. In her comment, Svetlana Prokopyeva pointed out that Mikhail Zhlobitsky's act was a response to the authorities' suppression of peaceful protest, which curtailed political pluralism and destroyed independent judiciary. Her comments were also published by the local online outlet, Pskov News Feed.

On 5 February 2019, the authorities opened a criminal investigation and the next day they searched her home. All her computers, phones and other digital devices were seized. Several months later, her bank account was frozen. Over a year later, Svetlana Prokopyeva is unable to open a bank account in her name or travel outside of the city where she lives. Under Article 205.2 §2 of the Criminal Code, she faces up to seven years of imprisonment, or a hefty fine, if found guilty.

In December 2019, Pskov City Prosecutor's Office refused to approve the indictment of Svetlana Prokopyeva and returned the case to the Investigative Committee for review. However, on 16 March the case received approval from the prosecutor and was sent to court. The trial is expected to start soon.

The Russian authorities have a long history of restricting freedom of expression, including in printed, broadcast and online media, including under criminal and administrative charges ranging from "LGBT propaganda", to "promotion of separatism" and "offending religious feelings". Independent journalists have also faced prosecution under other trumped-up charges such as financing of terrorism or drug dealing.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 21 July 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Svetlana Prokopyeva (she/her)