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Russian Federation: FSB vs. Grigory Pasko- Punishment without a
crime

A day before a new trial opens in Vladivostok against the journalist, environmental activist and human rights defender Grigory Pasko, Amnesty International urges that all charges against him are dropped and he is fully acquitted.

Grigory Pasko faces up to 20 years' imprisonment for treason and espionage because he reported on the Russian navy's illegal dumping of nuclear waste off the coast of Vladivostok. He informed the public about the dangers of such acts to human life and health in full compliance with Russian law and therefore should not be prosecuted at all.

Grigory Pasko peacefully exercised his fundamental right to freedom of expression and should not have been imprisoned, tried and sentenced in the first place, said Amnesty International today. The organization has closely observed the case since it started in 1997 and adopted Grigory Pasko as a prisoner of conscience while he was subjected to 20 months of pretrial detention.

Withholding information about the condition of the environment or on incidents or catastrophes which endanger human life -- precisely the kind of information Grigory Pasko revealed - - violates the Russian Constitution. This is a crime under the Russian Criminal Code punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, the organization pointed out.

It is therefore profoundly ironic that charges remain against a man who was not only wrongly imprisoned, but who initially only aimed to alert the world to a potential environmental disaster, Amnesty International added.

The treatment of Grigory Pasko is part of an established pattern of persecution of environmental activists by the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB). In a media interview given in July 1999, when Vladimir Putin was head of the FSB, he characterized the Russian environmental movement as a Trojan horse for espionage by foreign powers, and called Grigory Pasko a spy.

The Russian security services' actions against anybody who dares speak out about environmental crimes is a sign of a wider crackdown on civil liberties and an attempt to control civil society, Amnesty International said.

Background

Grigory Pasko, a reporter for Boyevaya Vakhta (Battle Watch), the newspaper of the Russian Pacific Fleet, was pronounced guilty at the end of a six-month closed military trial in 1999 of abusing his official position. Amnesty International expressed serious concerns about the fairness of the trial, and about the impartiality and independence of the court. Grigory Pasko was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, but was immediately released from detention under the terms of a nationwide amnesty. Charges of treason and espionage, for which the prosecution demanded a sentence of 12 years in a labour camp, were dismissed by the court.

The new trial follows a verdict of the Russian Supreme Court's Military Collegium, which decided in November 2000 that the former decision taken in July 1999 by the Military Court of the Pacific Fleet in Vladivostok did not correspond to the materials and facts of the case, and therefore sent the case back for a new trial in Vladivostok.

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