

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 46/14/97

UA 167/97 Prisoner of Conscience / Fear of further POCs

12 June 1997

RUSSIAN FEDERATIONOleg Pazyura, 55, human rights defender

Oleg Pazyura, a retired naval officer and a respected Russian human rights defender, is facing up to three years' imprisonment as a prisoner of conscience.

His arrest has heightened concern for other human rights activists in Russia, as it seems to be part of an official attempt to silence independent human rights advocates and to prevent them from further exposing violations by the judicial or law enforcement authorities.

Oleg Pazyura was arrested on 26 May 1997 in the northern city of Murmansk. According to his wife and daughter, five armed law enforcement officers broke into their home and, without identifying themselves or showing an arrest warrant, handcuffed and took him away. The family were not informed of his whereabouts for four days. On the fifth day they were told that he was being held in the Murmansk pre-trial detention centre (SIZO), and had been charged under two articles of the Russian Criminal Code: Article 129(3) (slander of a person or a public official with accusations of committing serious or especially heinous crime), and Article 296(2) (a threat or violent actions against procurator, investigator, interrogator or other officials in the process of their judicial activities or during the preliminary investigation).

Oleg Pazyura has been active with the Murmansk Centre for Human Rights, and prior to his arrest, he had participated in a meeting organized by the new governor of Murmansk Region, A. Evdokimov, with local human rights groups. At the meeting, Oleg Pazyura reportedly spoke publicly about violations of the judicial process by the courts and corruption in the procuracy.

Shortly after this meeting, several law enforcement officials came to Oleg Pazyura's home and, despite not having an arrest warrant, tried to detain him. The family did not open the door and called the police, who, when they arrived, ordered the officials to leave because they did not have legal grounds for the arrest. Oleg Pazyura's arrest was then carried out a week later by officers from Oktyabrsky District Department of Internal Affairs (ROVD) in Murmansk. The investigator into the case, Sergey Kulikov, has not allowed Oleg Pazyura's family to visit him in detention. In addition, Oleg Pazyura was not given a defence lawyer, after the one he requested declined to represent him, allegedly fearing persecution by the authorities.

Amnesty International believes that the charges against Oleg Pazyura are unfounded and that he has been singled out and arrested to prevent him from continuing with his human rights work and exercising his freedom of expression. This is a clear violation of Article 29 of the Russian Constitution and of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Recent months have seen the persecution and imprisonment of other local human rights defenders. The similarities in the cases, including those of Yury Shadrin from Omsk, Rafail Usmanov from Magadan, Alexey Suvorov from Arkhangelsk, suggest an attempt by local authorities to silence independent human rights advocates, and raise serious concern for the future defence of human rights in Russia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oleg Pazyura became involved with human rights advocacy by defending, at first, his own rights which he claimed were violated when after serving as a

high-ranking officer in the Russian Northern Fleet for over 30 years he was discharged in 1987, allegedly, in violation of the law. He complained against this decision and fought for years to prove that his rights had been violated. In 1994, after organizing a picket in the city centre of Murmansk, Oleg Pazyura was detained and held in custody for three months. His discharge from the army was found to be illegal by the Military Procurator of the Northern Fleet, by the former Minister of Defence, and by the court. Nevertheless, to date, the decision to discharge him from service has not been reversed and he has not been compensated for damages.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian or your own language:

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Oleg Pazyura as a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his human rights activities and for the peaceful expression of his right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Article 29 of the Russian Constitution, Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 10 of the European Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- seeking assurances that Oleg Pazyura's human rights will not be violated in future because of his activities on behalf of other victims of human rights violations;
- expressing serious concern about the apparent pattern of persecution and imprisonment of human rights defenders by the local authorities in the Russian Federation and calling on the federal government to take urgent measures to stop the persecution of any human rights advocates.

APPEALS TO:

Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Yuriy Skuratov
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
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 ul. B. Dmitrovka, 15a
 Prokuratura Rossiyskoy Federatsii
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Salutation: Dear Procurator General

Procurator of Murmansk Region, D.V. Miloserdov
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
 g. Murmansk - 183740,
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 Oblastnaya Prokuratura
 Prokuroru Miloserdovu, D.V.
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Telegrams: Oblastnomu prokuroru Miloserdovu, Murmansk, Rossiya
Salutation: Dear Procurator

President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
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Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of RUSSIAN FEDERATION accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 July 1997.