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Moldova: Authorities harass peaceful protestor

The Moldovan authorities continue to obstruct and harass peaceful protests despite a new law on assembly, Amnesty International said today in response to the detention of a peaceful protestor in the capital Chisinau.

"By harassing peaceful protestors, the authorities violate their obligations to uphold the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia Regional Programme.

On the morning of 29 January 2009, Prosecutor Day in Moldova, Anatol Matasaru was detained outside the offices of the Prosecutor General in Chisinau, as he held a one-man protest dressed in a pig suit and using audio equipment to play the sound of a pig squealing. He was protesting about allegedly being ill-treated by police officers in 2006 and the failure by the prosecutors' office to open an investigation following his complaint about the incident. Additionally, he was complaining about two criminal investigations against him which he claims were based on fabricated evidence.

Anatol Matasaru had a sign on his back which read: "Today is my professional day". Also as part of the protest, he displayed images showing pigs in different contexts, with text underneath, which he hung between two trees. The text read: "The prosecutors hide the abuses of the police", "Moldova - a state controlled by police", "No to police terror", "No to fabricated files", and "Stop fabricating the charges".

Anatol Matasaru was detained for approximately five hours and charged with not properly informing the mayor, failure to abide by the orders of the police, resisting arrest, and insulting the police and the prosecutors. He alleges that he was punched by a police officer while in detention.

Anatol Matasaru had been previously arrested on 18 December 2008 as he was preparing a similar protest, using a piglet and donkey. The piglet was dressed as a prosecutor and the donkey as a police officer. Anatol Matasaru was charged with similar offences and on 22 December 2008 he was found guilty and fined 200 lei (£13). He appealed the sentence which is still pending before the Chisinau Court of Appeal.

Background

On 22 February 2008 the Moldovan parliament passed a new law on assembly, which came into force on 22 April and marked a significant step towards greater freedom of expression in Moldova. Organizers of public events have to inform local authorities of the event, but are no longer required to seek permission, and assemblies of less than 50 individuals can meet spontaneously without notification. The law also stipulates that assemblies can only be prohibited by a court.

Despite these provisions, police and local authorities continue to restrict freedoms of assembly, association and expression. Since the new law came into force, the police have obstructed more than 30 peaceful

protests. More recently, Amnesty International has observed that such interferences have included detaining protestors ahead of their demonstrations.

The rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed by various international human rights standards to which Moldova is a state party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Furthermore, it is well established in international law that officials should tolerate more, rather than less, criticism than private individuals. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly emphasized that the right to freedom of expression applies not only to information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb.