

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Amnesty International welcomes release today of human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov

Today, a court in Krasnoyarsk decided to release Aleksei Sokolov on parole. He was arrested in May 2009 and sentenced for theft and robbery a year later, on charges that many believed to have been fabricated in response to his human rights work in defence of prisoners' rights. He was allowed to leave the prison colony shortly after the court hearing and is now travelling back home to his family in Yekaterinburg.

Alexei Sokolov has had two previous parole applications turned down on the flimsiest of pretexts.

When Amnesty International spoke to Aleksei Sokolov this morning, he said he was just relieved to be able to go back to his wife and children.

He thanked Amnesty International and its members as well as the many other human rights organizations that have supported him over the last two years.

Background

Human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov, head and founder of the organization Pravovaia Osnova in Ekaterinburg, was detained on 13 May 2009 and later charged with theft. He was briefly released on 31 July 2009 but detained the same day and charged with robbery in connection with a different incident. He has been kept in detention ever since, including at times without a judicial decision legalizing his prolonged pre-trial detention. On 14 May he was found guilty of theft and robbery and sentenced to five years imprisonment. Upon appeal his sentence was reduced to three years.

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