

PUBLIC

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Torture/unfair trial

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Aleksei Sokolov (m), human rights defender

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Human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov was detained on 13 May, and is in danger of torture and other ill-treatment.

He is the head of the organization *Pravovaia Osnova* (Legal Basis), which campaigns on torture and other ill-treatment of people held in Russia's prisons and detention centres. He was detained on the street outside his apartment, in the city of Yekaterinburg: he had his two-year-old daughter with him at the time. The police, who were in plain clothes, took her from him, put her down and rang the doorbell of his apartment. They told his wife when she answered the intercom to pick up the child. When she came running to the door, she found the girl outside: the police had already pushed Aleksei Sokolov into their car and were about to drive away.

The police had detained him on suspicion that he had taken part in a 2004 robbery. The investigation into this robbery had been closed several times because of failure to identify a suspect. On 23 April 2009 the investigation was reopened yet again: according to police, one suspect, already in prison for another crime, had confessed to committing the robbery together with Aleksei Sokolov.

Aleksei Sokolov told his lawyer that police had threatened him while he was in custody that they "could not beat him but would know how to torture him," and said, "You thought you could control us, nobody can control the police. You've got what you deserved as a human rights defender." His lawyer told Amnesty International that the police had used handcuffs to inflict pain on Aleksei Sokolov and that he saw marks from the handcuffs on Aleksei Sokolov's wrists.

As a suspect in a crime, Aleksei Sokolov may be detained without charge for up to 10 days. A judge ruled that he was such a suspect on 14 May, saying that as a member of the public commission for the control of places of detention, Aleksei Sokolov might use his position, which enables him to visit detainees, to influence those detainees, including the other suspect in the robbery, during the investigation of the case. He could, for instance, persuade the other suspect to withdraw his statement implicating Aleksei Sokolov.

Aleksei Sokolov expressed concern that the police might try to pressure him into making a "confession." He has worked on many cases of detainees who have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated to make them confess, and believes the police might do the same to him.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has known Aleksei Sokolov for several years and has campaigned jointly with him against human rights violations.

Aleksei Sokolov has taken up numerous cases of torture and other ill-treatment in detention, of police violence and death in custody. In 2006 he distributed a film about torture and other ill-treatment in prison colony IK-2 in Yekaterinburg. Part of the prison colony had been used as a temporary holding centre for people under arrest, in which, according to the film, people were tortured. The film received wide coverage, both in Russia and internationally, and led to the closure of the temporary holding centre. The work of Legal Basis brought

about several investigations into police and prison colony staff, accused of crimes including the use of torture to force suspects to confess.

Aleksei Sokolov has been attacked and harassed before now. On 2 August 2006, police searched his apartment, claiming that stolen goods were kept there. However, they confiscated material relating to cases Aleksei Sokolov was preparing for the European Court of Human Rights, correspondence with prisoners, copies of documents regarding investigations into allegations of human rights violations as well as a TV, computer and children's toys.

On 10 June 2008, he had eggs thrown at him, when he and two other human rights defenders, Lev Ponomarev and Ludmila Alekseeva, gave a press conference about death of detainees in a prison colony on 31 May. In January 2009 several prison service officials were charged with exceeding official authority in regard to this case.

Aleksei Sokolov's wife told Amnesty International that her husband has been threatened on many occasions and was warned not to continue his work.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Russian, English or your own language:**

- calling on the authorities to ensure that Aleksei Sokolov is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- urging them to release him immediately unless he is promptly charged with a recognisably criminal offence, and given a prompt and fair trial;
- urging them to demonstrate respect for the lawful work of human rights defenders, and to ensure they are free to pursue their lawful activities without fear of repercussions.

**APPEALS TO:**

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation  
Yurii Ya. Chaika  
Ul Bolshaia Dmitrovka 15a  
Moscow GSP-3  
125993, Russian Federation  
**Fax: +7 495 692 17 25**  
**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General**

Prosecutor of the Sverdlovsk Region  
Yurii A. Ponomarev  
Ul. Moskovskaia 21  
Yekaterinburg  
GSP 1036  
Sverdlovsk Region  
620219, Russian Federation  
**Fax: +7 343 377 02 41**  
**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor**

Department for Internal Affairs Yekaterinburg  
Colonel Marat Kh. Bisinbaev  
ul. Frunze 74  
Yekaterinburg  
620144, Russian Federation  
**Salutation: Dear Colonel**

Ombudsperson for the Russian Federation  
Vladimir P. Lukin  
ul. Miasnitskaia 47

Moscow  
107048, Russian Federation  
**Fax: +7 495 607 74 70**  
**Salutation: Dear Mr. Lukin**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 June 2009.