

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

15 October 2020

AI Index: EUR 46/3226/2020

# RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AUTHORITIES CRACK DOWN ON ONGOING PEACEFUL PROTESTS IN Khabarovsk

Russian authorities have intensified their crackdown on peaceful protesters in the region of Khabarovsk Krai in Russia's Far East. For the first time since the protests began three months ago, OMON (riot police) forces dispersed a peaceful gathering of demonstrators and subjected some of its participants to severe beatings. At least one peaceful protester has been charged by the Investigative Committee (a stand-alone agency tasked with investigation of serious crime) under the [notorious "Dadin's law"](#) for "repeated violations" of Russia's draconian legislation on mass gatherings.

The protests in Khabarovsk and several other towns in the region began on 11 July, after Sergey Furgal, Khabarovsk Krai's governor who was in opposition to the ruling United Russia party, was arrested, flown to Moscow and remanded as a criminal suspect. Sergey Furgal stands accused of masterminding several killings in 2004 and 2005, an accusation which he denies and which is seen by his supporters as politically motivated. The weekly protests against his arrest have drawn tens of thousands of participants.

Protests proceeded peacefully and have been the largest in the region's history until last week. Initially, the authorities generally allowed the protests to proceed, something atypical for Russia in recent years, although several demonstrators have been arrested. However, in recent weeks, police began regularly arresting their participants, holding some of them in administrative detention for violation of Russia's unduly restrictive regulations governing assemblies.

On 10 October, a group of several dozen protesters were holding a rally in solidarity with Sergey Furgal on Lenin Square, in front of the Khabarovsk Krai administration. The protesters pitched several small tents on a lawn and were playing music when a group of about a dozen OMON officers in riot gear approached them and began arresting protesters and dragging them into police vehicles. Although few if any offered any resistance, the officers used truncheons, electric shockers and significant physical force to detain them. The officers then proceeded to destroy the tents and disperse the remaining protesters. According to human rights watchdog OVD-info, at least 30 protesters and journalists were arrested, including two minors, and at least three individuals were seriously injured. There have been no reports of an investigation into OMON's conduct.

One of the wounded demonstrators, Aleksandr Prikhodko, is also facing charges under Article 212.1 of the Criminal Code ("repeated violation of the established order of holding a public assembly"). This Article criminalizes repeated – more than three times within 180 days – violations, however minor, of Russia's unduly restrictive legislation on public gatherings, and envisages imprisonment of up to five years. Although the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation has ruled that this provision cannot be used against peaceful protesters whose actions did not result in any public harm, several protesters and human rights defenders have already been charged, and two convicted, under this article. One of them, prisoner of conscience Konstantin Kotov, is currently serving an 18-month long prison sentence.

According to Aleksandr Prikhodko's lawyer, Andrey Bityutsky, the activist is accused of participating in "unsanctioned" marches on 10, 16 and 22 September. The rally held on 10 October would be the fourth "violation". The official casework notes that he has not committed any violent acts or issued calls to violence, and that all the protests have been entirely peaceful. Aleksandr Prikhodko is being targeted merely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. This is a violation of international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights to which Russia is a party.

Amnesty International urges the Russian authorities to drop all charges against Aleksandr Prikhodko and all others who have been charged solely for protesting peacefully. The authorities have an obligation to respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly for all, and should allow peaceful protests in Khabarovsk Krai, and elsewhere, to continue without undue restrictions or fear of reprisals, including by repealing Article 212.1 of the Criminal Code.

The authorities should also launch a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the actions of OMON forces in Khabarovsk on 10 October, and ensure that any officer reasonably suspected of using unlawful force against participants of a peaceful rally are held to account.