

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 46/26/90

Distrib : PG/SC

Date: 12 June 1990

MEDICAL CONCERN

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich GOLDOVICH

USSR

Amnesty International is seeking clarification from the Soviet authorities of the precise reasons for the continued detention of Aleksandr Goldovich whose case is under investigation by the organization. He is held in a strict regime labour colony and is said to suffer from a number of health problems.

Aleksandr Goldovich was born in 1947 and is a physicist by profession. He and his wife, Natalya Sokolova, were arrested in Moscow on 21 April 1985 reportedly for trying to flee the USSR by boat across the Black Sea. They stood trial in Moscow on 2 December 1985, and Aleksandr Goldovich was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in a strict-regime corrective labour colony to be followed by five years' internal exile. His wife received an 18-month sentence and has now been released.

Since 1987 over 300 known or suspected prisoners of conscience have been released in the USSR. Many of them have since provided information about other prisoners who were previously not known to Amnesty International. The first news of Aleksandr Goldovich's case was passed on by a former prisoner of conscience who had been imprisoned with him.

Aleksandr Goldovich was convicted of "treason... in the form of flight abroad" and of "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda"; at the time of his arrest he was reportedly carrying a copy of a satirical work by the emigré Soviet philosopher Aleksandr Zinoviev. He is also said to have been convicted of illegally possessing a small amount of foreign currency and, according to one unidentified source, he may also have been charged with "divulging a state secret". Nothing more is known about these two charges, but both would have formed only a small part of the total sentence passed against him.

The right to leave one's own country is proclaimed in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the USSR ratified in 1973. In practice, however, most Soviet citizens have found it very difficult to leave the USSR. Their applications have commonly been turned down, and they have risked public criticism, job-dismissal and sometimes even imprisonment if they persisted in their efforts. Leaving without permission is a crime punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment and five years' internal exile - or even death. At any one time Amnesty International has under adoption as prisoners of conscience a number of individuals sentenced to imprisonment for their non-violent attempts to leave the Soviet Union. The law against "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda" penalized freedom of expression and was used to imprison hundreds of non-conformists since the 1960s. It was abolished in 1989.

Amnesty International is seeking clarification of all the charges which were brought against Aleksandr Goldovich during his trial and is asking the

Soviet authorities to review his case to ensure that he is not imprisoned solely for seeking to exercise his right to leave his own country.

Aleksandr Goldovich is held in a strict-regime corrective labour colony for political prisoners in the Perm region of the Russian Republic. In July 1989 a French television crew visited the camp, known as Perm 35, and the resulting documentary film was shown on television in several European countries. At one point in the film Aleksandr Goldovich can be seen sharing a punishment cell with two other prisoners. His mother reports that he is frequently punished but the reasons are not known.

In a letter from Aleksandr Goldovich written in January 1990 he states that he suffers from chronic gastritis and believes he has a gastric ulcer as he has periods of vomiting and pain in the stomach region. He also suffers from polyarthrititis and is said to be in a poor general state of health. It is not known what medication and medical care is available to him in the labour colony. He reports having suffered a fractured rib in September 1989 while having his head shaved. (Compulsory head-shaving is a practice common to all corrective labour colonies for men, to which he objects.)

Amnesty International is seeking further details of the legal grounds under which he is detained and details of his health and present conditions of confinement.