

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST MUST BE RELEASED

On 31 March a court in Kirsanov, Tambov Region, will consider Yevgeniy Vitishko's request for parole. He is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

After having served a year of his prison term and becoming formally eligible for parole, **Yevgeniy Vitishko** submitted his parole request to Kirsanovskiy District Court in Tambov Region. It is hoped that the court will use this opportunity to redress the gross injustice committed against Yevgeniy Vitishko and he will walk free. In order for this to happen, his release on parole needs to be approved by the penitentiary administration and not opposed by the Prosecutor's Office.

Yevgeniy Vitishko is a prominent member of the environmental organisation Environmental Watch for the North Caucasus (Ecologicheskaya Vakhta po Severnomu Kavkazu).

During his year in custody, Yevgeniy Vitishko has experienced harassment from the authorities. In particular, he received several formal reprimands for various purported "violations", for instance, "storing tinned food in his bag". In August 2014 he was placed into an isolation cell as punishment. His lawyers believe that Yevgeniy Vitishko received these reprimands because he had complained about the working conditions and ill-treatment at the penal colony, as well as for helping other prisoners to write official complaints. At least one of the reprimands was later quashed in court. These reprimands may be used by the authorities in court to deny Yevgeniy Vitishko a chance to be released on parole.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Yevgeniy Vitishko as he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Expressing concerns that Yevgeniy Vitishko has been subjected to harassment by the penitentiary administration.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 MAY 2015 TO:

Prosecutor of Tambov Region

Vladimir Ivanovich Torgovchenkov
Prosecutor's Office of Tambov Region
ul. Lermontovskaya, 1
392000 Tambov, Russian Federation
Fax: +7 4752 725 401
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Director of the Federal Service of

Execution of Punishments

Gennadii Aleksandrovich Kornienko
ul. Zhitnaya 14, GSP-1
119991 Moscow, Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 982 19 50 /
+7 495 982 19 30
Email: udmail@fsin.su
Salutation: Dear Director

And copies to:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 5841; +7 495 692 1725

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 14/14. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR46/013/2014/en/>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yevgeniy Vitishko is a prominent member of the environmental organisation Environmental Watch for the North Caucasus (Ecologicheskaya Vakhta po Severnomu Kavkazu). He and his fellow activists have been actively involved in protests regarding the deforestation, construction and illegal fencing in protected areas in Krasnodar Region.

In June 2012, a court in Tuapse conditionally sentenced him to three years in a prison colony, with a two-year probation period, for allegedly damaging in November 2011 a fence erected illegally in a protected forest in Krasnodar region. Yevgeniy Vitishko and other local environmental activists asserted that the fencing was illegal, and that rare protected trees were being cut down behind it, and their intentions were to document these violations. For months, the activists were urging local and federal-level government agencies to address this ongoing violation, but no action was taken by the authorities. The activists then took down two sections of the fence to photograph the violations, and sprayed graffiti on the fence.

Yevgeniy Vitishko and his co-defendant Suren Gazaryan, who has since left the country and received asylum abroad on the basis that he was being targeted for his environmental activism, did not receive a fair trial. There were a number of substantial concerns about the merits of the case and procedural violations. Some of these concerns were expressly noted by the Russian Supreme Court which ruled, in October 2013, that the lower instance court should have considered the issue of legality of construction of the fence and the identity of the fence's legal owner, on which the defence had been insisting. Despite the ruling of the Supreme Court, a lower court took a view that there were no grounds for reviewing Yevgeniy Vitishko's case.

In the run-up to the Sochi Winter Olympics, Yevgeniy Vitishko, as well as other members of his organization, were continuously subjected to a harassment campaign by the Russian authorities, including repeated arrests and brief detentions, personal searches, questioning of activists themselves and of their close relatives by police, and unofficial warnings from police and security officials to abstain from protesting during the Sochi Olympics.

On 20 December 2013, Yevgeniy Vitishko was brought to court in relation to allegations that he had travelled outside his hometown without permission and thereby had broken the conditions of the curfew (travel restrictions) associated with his conditional sentence. The judge ruled that for this he should serve the original three-year sentence in a prison colony.

On 3 February 2014 the police arrested Yevgeniy Vitishko as he was leaving the Probation offices in Tuapse, where he was to report on a regular basis as one of the requirements of his conditional sentence, and told he was suspected of a theft. He was taken to court the same day and was found guilty of "petty hooliganism" on trumped-up charges of having used foul language at a bus stop earlier the same morning. He was sentenced to 15 days in detention. It was only after Yevgeniy Vitishko began serving this sentence that his lawyer was able to see him.

On 12 February 2014, Krasnodar Regional Court rejected Yevgeniy Vitishko's appeal against the court decision of 20 December 2013 and confirmed that Yevgeniy Vitishko should serve his original sentence in jail. His sentence started on 18 February 2014 and on 24 February 2014 Yevgeniy Vitishko was sent to a penal colony in Tambov Region.

According to the Russian Criminal Code, conditions for parole include the "convict's behaviour, attitude to study and work when serving his sentence, including commendations and reprimands which the convict received ... as well as a submission of the penal institution's administration regarding whether it is worthwhile to release the prisoner on parole."

Name: Yevgeniy Vitishko

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 14/14 Index: EUR 46/1302/2015 Issue Date: 25 March 2015