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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST ALEKSANDR NIKITIN
SHOULD BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY**

Russian environmental activist Aleksandr Nikitin should be released immediately and unconditionally, Amnesty International said today following a recent visit to Russia to investigate his case.

Aleksandr Nikitin, a retired naval officer, wrote chapter 8 of a report for the Norwegian environmental organization 'Bellona Foundation' on the dangers of radioactive contamination caused by the Russian Northern Fleet. Nikitin was charged by the Federal Security Service (FSB) with disclosing state secrets under Article 64 of the Russian Criminal Code (treason) and has been held in detention since 6 February 1996.

"After exhaustive investigation of chapter 8 of the Bellona report, the disclosure of the information contained in the chapter can be no justification for restricting Nikitin's freedom of expression on the grounds of protecting Russia's national security interests," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization added that the FSB has been obstructing a fair judicial determination of the case since the day of Nikitin's arrest.

"The conduct of the investigation by the FSB gives serious reason to believe that Aleksandr Nikitin's prosecution is politically motivated," Amnesty International said.

"This case reflects the deteriorating human rights situation in Russia, the growing powers of the FSB, the security service's xenophobia and the increasing amount of information classified as state secret in Russia."

Amnesty International believes that the conviction of Aleksandr Nikitin may well trigger further arbitrary prosecutions by the FSB.

After Aleksandr Nikitin's arrest in February, the FSB refused to allow his lawyer to represent him for security clearance reasons. Only a decision by the Constitutional Court on 27 March corrected this. Two expert committees, which were appointed by the FSB to assess the Bellona report, have refused to look into claims by Nikitin and Bellona that all information in chapter 8 of the report was taken from already publicly available materials.

The expert committees have also refused to take into consideration the Russian Law on State Secrets (1993) which states that no information on the environment can be classified as state secret and have limited themselves to two decrees on state secrets issued by the Ministry of Defence, issued in 1992 and 1993. These decrees have legal force only to the extent they are not in contradiction with higher legislation, such as the Law on State Secrets.

Amnesty International is concerned that Aleksandr Nikitin's health is deteriorating in detention. His sight has reportedly seriously worsened over the last months and he is suffering from severe headaches. During a court hearing on 21 August, Nikitin looked exhausted and drawn.
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Amnesty International has exclusive video footage of Aleksandr Nikitin taken during a court hearing (taken from outside because the family was not allowed in the court room).

An external report on the case of Aleksandr Nikitin is being prepared for publication.