

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

External Document

AI Index: EUR 46/043/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 185
29 October 2002

Embargo Date: 29 October 2002 09:00 GMT

Russian Federation: Information on speakers

Press conference to launch the campaign "Justice for Everybody"

Olga Kitova

Olga Petrovna Kitova was born on 24 May 1954. She studied journalism in Voronezh, and later lived in Chita, Tbilisi and other cities of the former Soviet Union with her husband, who was an army officer. After the death of her husband Olga Kitova moved to Belgorod in 1995, where she worked for the newspaper Belgorodskaya Pravda and was a member of the Belgorod Regional Parliament. She has one son.

As an investigative journalist with Belgorodskaya Pravda, Olga Kitova wrote articles exposing official corruption and critical of the local authorities for squandering public money. Her life took an unexpected turn after she was detained and arrested in March 2001 on criminal charges following an article she wrote on an alleged rape case.

The case of Olga Kitova was taken up by Amnesty International and other NGOs. It drew the media's attention because of the serious irregularities in her treatment by law enforcement officials, resulting in a clear violation of her human rights and endangering her life. After the first arrest, she was treated in hospital for high blood pressure and bruises and injuries to her heads and arms. After the second arrest, two months later, she had to be treated for a heart attack.

The District Court in Belgorod ruled that the arrest of Olga Kitova was unlawful because the prosecution failed to present sufficient grounds for her arrest. She was tried later the same year for allegedly slandering a family in one of her articles, interfering with criminal investigation, insulting and using force against officials .

In December 2001 Olga Kitova was given a suspended sentence of two-and-a-half years by the Belgorod Regional Court, which banned her from seeking public office for three years and imposed heavy fines on her. After an appeal in July 2002, the Russian Supreme Court removed the main charges, i.e. slander and interfering with criminal investigation, and reduced her sentence.

Olga Kitova and her lawyers are appealing against this decision to receive a full acquittal. They are going to refer her case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Sergei Kovalev

Sergei Adamovich Kovalev was born on 2 March 1930 in Ukraine and later moved with his family to the region of Moscow. A biologist by profession, he gained prominence as a human rights campaigner, Russian Duma deputy, former head of a parliamentary human rights committee and a strong opponent to Russia's war in Chechnya.

Sergei Kovalev got involved in human rights in the late 1960s and was a founding member of the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in the USSR in 1969. In 1974 he was arrested and sent to the GULAG; he was later sent into exile for publicizing the cases of human rights prisoners.

Sergei Kovalev was a founding member of the Moscow Amnesty International group. He was an Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience for the period of his detention and exile until 1987.

During Gorbachev's period of *perestroika*, Sergei Kovalev returned to Moscow and continued his work as a human rights activist. He is one of the founders of the human rights organization *Memorial*, which was established originally to work on Stalinism and crimes committed during Soviet times, and now devotes the bulk of its work to human rights violations committed today, including human rights violations in Chechnya. Sergei Kovalev is the chairperson of the Russian branch of the organization.

Sergei Kovalev entered public life in the beginning of the 1990s. He is one of the authors of Russia's Declaration on Human and Civil Rights, which laid the foundation for human rights' legislation in the Russian Federation. He has been elected several times as a deputy of the Russian Duma. In the present Duma he is representing the Union of Right Forces.

Sergei Kovalev has been a strong critic of Russia's military involvement in Chechnya from the start of the first conflict there in 1994. His condemnation of the widespread bombing of the Chechen capital Grozny and the deaths of innocent civilians helped bring international scrutiny, and ultimately censure, to the war. In 1996 Sergei Kovalev resigned as head of Yeltsin's presidential human rights commission, criticizing the president for a shift to authoritarianism. Recently he has been active as a critic of controls on Russian scientific exchanges abroad and of new anti-extremist legislation open to abuse by government authorities. He continues to criticize authoritarian tendencies in the present administration and human rights abuses in Chechnya.

Sergei Kovalev is often called the "conscience of Russia". He has received many international awards in recognition of his human rights activities. In 1995 and 1996 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>

