

URGENT ACTION

STOP THE INHUMANE TREATMENT OF MARIA PONOMARENKO IN PRISON

The Russian authorities are putting the health and life of journalist Maria Ponomarenko at risk due to her treatment, and the conditions in detention, including being held in solitary confinement and not receiving adequate healthcare. Maria was sentenced to six years imprisonment solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Gerasimov Sergei Yermagenovich

Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Altai krai
Lenina prospekt, 147-B, Barnaul, Altai krai
656011, Russian Federation
Email: ufsin.ak@gmail.com

Vasilyev Anton Aleksandrovich

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation in the Altai krai
Partizanskaya ul, 69,
Barnaul, Altai krai,
656059, Russian Federation
Email: upch@alregn.ru

Dear Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Altai Krai,
Dear Commissioner for Human Rights in the Altai Krai,

I am deeply concerned by the unjust imprisonment and alleged ill-treatment of a RusNews journalist Maria Ponomarenko who is under your control. Since her arrest in 2022 there have been multiple reports of her ill-treatment and arbitrary punishment in custody in IK-6 (Shipunovo) and SIZO-1 and SIZO-2 in Barnaul, including:

Forced psychiatric treatment, including administration of unknown drugs; Provision of ill-fitting shoes ahead of a disciplinary hearing; Disruptions in provision of medication; Confiscation of authorized goods and groceries by Federal Penitentiary Service staff; Threats by Federal Penitentiary Service staff to deprive Maria of phone calls with her family; Repeated placement in solitary confinement.

Maria suffers from claustrophobia and other mental health conditions and cannot safely be placed in solitary confinement. During her previous placement in a punishment cell her mental health deteriorated, and she attempted suicide. She went on hunger strike after being placed in solitary confinement to protest her undignified treatment by the prison authorities. This ill-treatment by the prison authorities under your control puts Maria Ponomarenko's health, both physical and mental, as well as her life at risk. It violates her human rights and I'm concerned this is being carried out as a form of reprisal for her expressing her anti-war views.

I urge you to release Maria Ponomarenko immediately and unconditionally. In the meantime, I request that you use your existing powers to ensure that the ill-treatment of Maria Ponomarenko is immediately stopped and that her treatment in any prison institution, as well as while in transit between them, complies with international law and standards. All those suspected of responsibility for Maria Ponomarenko's ill-treatment must be brought to justice in fair proceedings in accordance with international law.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maria Ponomarenko is an activist, blogger and a journalist from Barnaul, Altai Krai, who worked for the online media outlet RusNews. On 23 April 2022, she was arrested and detained by the police under Article 207.3 (2) (d) (“Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the Russian Armed Forces committed with motives of hatred or enmity”). The “false information” she was accused of disseminating was a 17 March post (which has since been deleted) in her Telegram channel about the bombing of the Donetsk Regional Academic Drama Theatre in Mariupol by Russian forces the previous morning. It contained a video from the theatre made before the attack and a short comment denouncing civilian deaths. On 15 February 2023, a court in Barnaul, Altai Krai found Maria Ponomarenko guilty and sentenced her to six years imprisonment and a five-year ban on engaging in journalism upon her release. The sentence was upheld on appeal. While in prison, Maria was accused with being violent towards the prison officers (Article 321, part 2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), which she denies. Maria Ponomarenko is a Prisoner of Conscience imprisoned solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and must be released immediately and unconditionally. She is one of the key cases that Amnesty International will work on in 2024 within the “Protect the Protest” campaign.

During her time in the remand centre and penal colony, Maria reported various forms of mistreatment. During her time in pre-trial detention, she was unlawfully placed in a psychiatric hospital and a punishment cell, and also survived a mental breakdown and a suicide attempt. Earlier this year Maria shared a list of violations of the rights of women prisoners in the penal colonies in Krasnoyarsk region and Altai Krai to women’s rights campaign group she was part of.

In April 2024, it’s now the fourth time that Maria Ponomarenko has been sent to a punishment cell. Two of her previous placements in a solitary confinement were prompted by her ill-health: another was due to her fainting, and another one – for not being able to get up from her bed upon a correction’s officer’s demand due to severe lower back pain. In the first three placements, she’s spent over 1,5 months in punishment cells, sometimes for longer than 15 days in a row. Several other people who received long sentences under the war censorship laws or in relation to their anti-war positions, such as Aleksei Gorinov and Vladimir Kara-Murza, have also been repeatedly placed in solitary confinement, deprived of adequate healthcare and other basic human rights.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian and English.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 May 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: [Maria Ponomarenko] (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [If previous UA exist, enter the link here] n/a