

URGENT ACTION

ASSAULTED PEACEFUL PROTESTER DENIED JUSTICE

Margarita Yudina was seriously injured by a police officer in front of cameras on 23 January during a peaceful protest in St Petersburg in support of Aleksei Navalny. Instead of investigating, the authorities issued apologies and sought to prevent her complaining formally. They sent child protection services to check on her daughter and signalled that her sons could face military conscription. The authorities must stop harassment of Margarita Yudina and her family, and bring her assailant to justice.

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

*Head of the Main Investigative Directorate
Lt-Gen Aleksandr Vladimirovich Klaus
Investigative Committee for St Petersburg
Naberezhnaya reki Moiki, 86-88
St Petersburg 190000, Russian Federation
Twitter: @gsuskrf_spb*

Online form (Russian): <https://spb.sledcom.ru/references>

Dear Head of the Main Investigative Directorate,

*I am writing to express my outrage about the violent attack by a police officer against **Margarita Yudina** during a peaceful protest in St Petersburg on 23 January. As seen in a widely circulated video, Margarita Yudina peacefully approached two police officers and asked them why they had just arrested a protester. In response, one of the officers kicked her in the stomach. Margarita Yudina fell on the ground injuring her head and had to be hospitalised in the intensive care unit. While still recovering from her injury at the hospital, she was visited by a TV crew and a police officer who issued an apology to her on camera.*

After Margarita Yudina indicated her intention to file a formal complaint about the incident and insist on a formal investigation, officials from the Prosecutor's Office and child protection services unexpectedly visited her home. The visit caused her deep distress and she had to be briefly hospitalised again. On 28 January, the head of the local administration was quoted in the media saying that child protection services "had questions" regarding the living conditions of Margarita Yudina's 15-year-old daughter (this typically implies that the authorities might seek custody of the child). The official also hinted that Margarita Yudina's two older sons should be considered for military conscription. There can be little, if any, doubt that Margarita Yudina and her family are facing harassment and intimidation to dissuade her from seeking justice for the police assault.

I urge you to initiate a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the attack against Margarita Yudina and ensure that she and her family are not subjected to further harassment and intimidation.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Following the arbitrary arrest at Moscow Sheremetyevo airport and detention of an opposition activist and anti-corruption campaigner Aleksei Navalny, hundreds of thousands of people took part in peaceful protests across Russia on 23 and 31 January 2021. The authorities responded with violence. International and Russian media showed footage of peaceful protesters being brutally beaten and arrested by police. According to Russian monitoring organization OVD-Info, more than 4,000 protesters were arrested on 23 January alone (with almost 600 of them in St Petersburg) and over 5,700 protesters were arrested on 31 January. Following the court hearing against Aleksei Navalny on 2 February which resulted in his imprisonment, protests took place again, and a further 1,400 people were detained. Thousands of people have been issued with large fines or sentenced to several days in detention under administrative law, and at least 40 criminal cases have been initiated against participants and organisers of the protests across the country. However, not a single investigation has been initiated so far into the unlawful use of force by the police.

Margarita Yudina is one of the peaceful protesters seeking justice for a brutal, unprovoked attack against her by a police officer during a peaceful rally. On 23 January, Margarita Yudina travelled some 147 km to St Petersburg from the town of Luga, in Leningrad Region, where she lives with her two sons (25 and 20-years-old) and her 15-year-old daughter, to take part in the demonstration.

On 26 January 2021, shortly after Margarita Yudina announced that she was planning to file an official complaint demanding an investigation into the policeman's attack against her, she was visited by officials from the Prosecutor's Office and child protection services at her home – something which happens when the authorities consider taking underage children into state care child welfare considerations. According to Margarita Yudina's lawyer, the officials insisted that they "only wanted to talk to her and her daughter" but she did not let them in. Two days later, the head of the local administration publicly stated that the child protection services had "questions" regarding the teenager's living conditions and studies. He also questioned why Margarita Yudina's sons had neither served in the army nor registered for military conscription.

Under Russian law, all men between the ages of 18 and 27 are obliged to register for military conscription and serve in the Armed Forces if conscribed, unless they are exempt, including on the grounds of health conditions or studying at a university. Over the last few years, the Russian authorities have apparently resorted to selective conscription to enlist politically active men under 27 years of age in to the army as a form of reprisal for dissent. Among those selectively conscripted are active associates of Aleksei Navalny, including the anchor of his YouTube channel, Ruslan Shaveddinov, Navalny's aide Artem Ionov, and the press secretary of the independent trade union Doctors' Alliance, Ivan Kononov.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russia, English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 9 April 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Margarita Yudina (she/her)