

UA 158/01

Health**RUSSIAN FEDERATION Olga Kitova, 47, journalist**

Journalist Olga Kitova is facing detention and possible imprisonment, apparently because of newspaper articles in which she alleged official corruption. She has high blood pressure, and suffered a heart attack when she was arrested in May. Amnesty International is concerned that her life would be in danger if she were again detained, and would consider her a possible prisoner of conscience.

Olga Kitova is an investigative journalist on the newspaper *Belgorodskaya Pravda*, and a member of the Belgorod regional parliament. She is known for writing articles critical of the regional authorities. She was detained in March, and arrested in May, but released on the orders of the Western District Court. That decision was overturned on 27 June as a result of a successful appeal to Belgorod Regional Court by the prosecutor. As a result, Olga Kitova now faces further detention and possible imprisonment.

On 21 March she was reportedly detained outside her home in Belgorod by 10 police officers, who beat her, pulled her hair and twisted her arms as they took her to the local prosecutor's office. She was taken from there to City Hospital No.1 to receive treatment for high blood pressure. The hospital registered that she had bruises and other injuries to the head and arms. She remained in hospital until 24 March, when she discharged herself.

The police said she had been detained because she had failed to respond to a summons for questioning under articles 294(2), 129(2) and 130(2) of the Criminal Code, which cover interference in a criminal investigation or prosecution, slander and defamation. The summons related to a series of articles Olga Kitova had written about the handling of a rape case. However, it appears that she is being prosecuted because of several articles she has written on miscarriages of justice and corruption among the local authorities.

Olga Kitova claims that when she received the summons on 16 March she wrote to the prosecutor stating that as a deputy in the regional parliament she could not be questioned or arrested on criminal charges until the regional parliament had formally approved this. (This is correct under Article 113 of Russian Federal Law 184.)

On 22 May Olga Kitova was arrested at her apartment. The arresting officers reportedly showed neither warrant nor official identification. She was taken to a temporary holding isolator (IVS) located in the district police station. There she reportedly suffered a heart attack. She asked for the emergency medical services to be called. When the emergency medical staff said she should be hospitalised immediately, the officers at the IVS called another doctor. This doctor pronounced Olga Kitova fit for transfer to the pre-trial detention centre (SIZO).

When she arrived at the SIZO, the duty doctor refused to accept her, because of the state of her health. The doctor who had been summoned to the IVS was summoned again, and again said Olga Kitova was fit to be detained. The SIZO doctor, however, continued to refuse to admit her, and she was taken to City Hospital No.1. There

she was guarded by two police officers, who reportedly prevented her from receiving visitors or phone calls, and from seeing her lawyer in private.

On 24 May, while still in hospital, Olga Kitova was charged with offences under articles 294(2), 129(2) and 130(2), and with further offences under articles 318(1) and 319, which cover insulting and using force against, or threatening, an official in the course of his duties.

On 28 May the Western District Court in Belgorod ruled that the arrest of Olga Kitova was unlawful on procedural grounds, and the guards left her bedside. However, she remained in hospital for treatment until 8 June.

An appeal by the prosecutor's office against the Western District Court's decision that the arrest of Olga Kitova on 22 May was unlawful was heard in the Belgorod Regional Court on 27 June and was successful. This means that she could be detained at any moment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian or your own language:**

- expressing concern that Olga Kitova may be facing charges solely for her legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression;
- expressing concern at the allegations that she was ill-treated by the 10 policemen who detained her in March 2001;
- expressing concern at the allegation that when she was arrested in May 2001 she was initially denied access to emergency hospital treatment;
- asking for an investigation into these allegations;
- expressing concern for Olga Kitova's health and safety should she be detained again.

**APPEALS**

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**Salutation: Dear President**

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**Salutation: Dear Sir**

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and to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 August 2001.