

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST CHARGED WITH "THEFT"

Russian human rights activist Aleksei Sokolov has been remanded in custody for questioning about a 2004 theft. AI fears that the charges were brought against him in order to prevent him carrying out his human rights work.

The Sverdlovsk Regional Court in the Russian Federation ruled on 31 July that **Aleksei Sokolov**, the activist under investigation for a 2004 robbery, should be discharged from pre-trial detention. Instead of releasing him, police told him he was now under arrest on suspicion of a different crime – a theft committed in 2004. At a 4 August hearing, Yekaterinburg District Court ordered that he should be remanded in custody to await trial.

The 4 August hearing should have been open, but the public was excluded from the courtroom without any explanations, and only Aleksei Sokolov's lawyers were allowed in. The court did not consider whether the charges against Aleksei Sokolov were well-founded, and took no account of his lawyers' claims that no proper record had been kept of his detention.

The judge agreed with the prosecutor, that Alexei Sokolov, as a member of the public commission for the control of places of detention would have met the men convicted of the 2004 theft, and could have influenced them. The judge decided to remand Alexey Sokolov in custody even though his membership of the public commission for the control of places of detention had been suspended in May 2009.

On 17 December 2005 the police had suspended their investigation into the theft in which Alexei Sokolov is accused of involvement, because they had not identified a suspect. The investigation was reopened on 23 July 2009, eight days before Alexei Sokolov was arrested again. The prosecution had obtained witness statements incriminating Aleksei Sokolov in the theft. However, the detention record did not specify who those witnesses were.

When Alexei Sokolov was arrested on suspicion of robbery, Amnesty International learned from other human rights organizations working in Sverdlovsk Region that police had pressured prisoners into making statements incriminating Aleksei Sokolov. He had repeatedly expressed fear that the police might do this to stop his human rights activities.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian, English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to release Alexei Sokolov to await trial;
- demanding that they grant Alexei Sokolov a prompt and fair trial;
- calling on them to demonstrate respect for the lawful work of human rights defenders, and ensure they are free to pursue their lawful activities without fear of repercussions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 September 2009 TO:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yurii Ya. Chaika
Ul. Bolshaia Dmitrovka, 15a
Moscow GSP-3
125993 Russian Federation

Fax: +7 495 692 17 25

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Prosecutor of the Sverdlovsk Region

Yurii A. Ponomarev
Ul. Moskovskaia, 21
Yekaterinburg
GSP 1036 Sverdlovsk Region
620219 Russian Federation

Fax: +7 343 377 02 41

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Department for Internal Affairs

Colonel Marat Kh. Bisinbaev
Ul. Frunze, 74
Yekaterinburg
620144 Russian Federation

Salutation: Dear Colonel Bisinbaev

And copies to: Ombudsperson for the Russian Federation, Vladimir P. Lukin, Ul. Miasnitskaia, 47 Moscow 107048 Russian Federation Fax: +7 495 607 74 70, and to **diplomatic representatives accredited to your country**. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 128/09, 18 May 2009, AI Index: EUR 46/011/2009. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/011/2009

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Aleksei Sokolov is the head of the organization *Pravovaia Osnova* (Legal Basis), which campaigns against torture and other ill-treatment of people held in Russia's prisons and detention centres.

In 2006 Aleksei Sokolov distributed a film about torture and other ill-treatment in prison colony IK-2 in Yekaterinburg. Part of the prison colony had been used as a temporary holding centre for people under arrest, and here, according to the film, people were tortured. The film received wide coverage, both in Russia and internationally, and led to the closure of the temporary holding centre. The work of Legal Basis brought about several investigations into police and prison colony staff, accused of crimes including the use of torture to force suspects to confess.

On 13 May 2009 Aleksei Sokolov was detained on suspicion that he had taken part in a 2004 robbery. The investigation into this robbery had been closed several times because of failure to identify a suspect. On 23 April 2009 the investigation was reopened yet again: according to police, one suspect, already in prison for another crime, had confessed to committing the robbery together with Aleksei Sokolov.

While he was in custody after being charged with involvement in the 2004 robbery, police told Aleksei Sokolov that they "could not beat him but would know how to torture him." Aleksei Sokolov also told his lawyer that police said, "You thought you could control us, nobody can control the police. You've got what you deserved as a human rights defender."

Aleksei Sokolov has been attacked and harassed before. On 2 August 2006, police searched his apartment, claiming that the previous owner might have kept stolen goods there. However, they confiscated material relating to cases Aleksei Sokolov was preparing for the European Court of Human Rights, correspondence with prisoners, copies of documents regarding investigations into allegations of human rights violations as well as a TV, computer and children's toys.

On 10 June 2008, he had eggs thrown at him, when he and two other human rights defenders, Lev Ponomarev and Ludmila Alekseeva, gave a press conference about deaths of detainees in a prison colony on 31 May. In January 2009 several prison service officials were charged with exceeding their authority in this case. Aleksei Sokolov's wife told Amnesty International that her husband had been threatened on many occasions and was warned not to continue his work.

Further information on UA: 128/09 Index: EUR 46/020/2009 Issue Date: 18 August 2009

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