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## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

#### **Despite the Court's rejection of the seventh indictment against him, Aleksandr Nikitin remains on trial**

The case against Aleksandr Nikitin was yesterday referred back to the Office of the Procurator for additional investigation.

Amnesty International believes that the decision by the St Petersburg City Court judge represents a significant victory for Nikitin and his defence lawyers, who have always maintained that there was no valid legal foundation for the charges against him.

However, the case remains open, and he is still under city arrest.

His defence lawyer, Yury Shmidt, said yesterday "there are no more facts to find in this case". Amnesty International agrees that another round of investigation into this case will yield nothing new.

The case has been under investigation for three years and the prosecution has not managed - and they never will - to come up with an indictment with a tenable factual and judicial foundation. In the absence of any new evidence, the risk is that the judge might once more refer the case back to the Federal Security Service (FSB), leaving Nikitin in an endless legal limbo.

Amnesty International continues to call for all charges against Aleksandr Nikitin to be dropped. He could still face up to 20 years in prison for actions that the Russian authorities describe as an act of treason, and what Amnesty International and the human rights movement call peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

The organization has always maintained that Aleksandr Nikitin is innocent of the charges brought against him and he should not have stood trial in the first place.

However, Amnesty International believes that the current situation arguably violates both Aleksandr Nikitin's constitutional right to have the charges against him settled by a court of justice (Article 47 and Article 46 of the Russian Constitution), and his rights under international law to be tried within reasonable time.

#### **Background**

Judge Sergey Golets reached his decision as he thought that three full years of investigation by the FSB had produced an indictment for treason and espionage against Russia's high-profile environmentalist which was too unclear and based on expert evidence which was unacceptable to the court.

The judge's ruling instructed the FSB to specify exactly what information in the Bellona report was secret. The FSB has at least a month to comply with the ruling.

Aleksandr Nikitin was arrested by the FSB on 6 February 1996, after writing two chapters for the Norwegian environmental group Bellona Foundation's report on the risks of radioactive contamination from accidents with nuclear submarines in Russia's Northern Fleet. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience.

He was held in pre-trial detention until 14 December 1996, when he was released. The charges against him, however, remained and he was officially restricted to the city limits of St Petersburg pending trial.

On 30 June the case of Aleksandr Nikitin was finally referred to the St Petersburg City Court, after the St Petersburg Procurator confirmed the charges brought by the FSB against him.

Bill Bowring, a human rights lawyer and member of the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, observed the trial proceedings on behalf of Amnesty International, in order to ensure that legal procedure has been followed in line with international standards.

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**Mariana Katzarova, Researcher on the Russian Federation, is available for comments regarding the case of Aleksandr Nikitin. To contact her or to receive further information, please call Amnesty International's Press Office in London on: +44 171 413 5566/5808/5810. *Video footage of Aleksandr Nikitin is also available.***