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RUSSIA: POLITICAL ACTIVIST VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA IS A PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE WHO MUST BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY

Vladimir Kara-Murza, a prominent Russian political activist and journalist, is facing criminal prosecution for “public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Russian Armed Forces to protect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens, and uphold international peace and security” for his criticism of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Under Article 207.3(2)(d) of the Criminal Code, he may face up to 10 years in prison. Vladimir Kara-Murza is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally. His criminal prosecution must be terminated, and Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code must be repealed.

Vladimir Kara-Murza was a close associate of prominent opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and cooperated with former prisoner of conscience Mikhail Khodorkovsky and other political opposition groups, human rights NGOs and independent media. He is known for campaigning in support of the “Magnitsky list” and other targeted sanctions against people suspected of human rights abuses in Russia.

Vladimir Kara-Murza survived two poisoning attempts, in 2015 and 2017. According to the investigative collective Bellingcat, prior to these poisonings he had been followed by the same Federal Security Service (FSB) unit that would later poison Aleksei Navalny.¹ There has been no investigation by the Russian authorities into either poisoning.

On 11 April, Vladimir Kara-Murza was arrested in Moscow near his home. According to a police report, “at the sight of the police officers, [he] behaved inappropriately, changed his direction of travel, quickened his pace and tried to hide in response to their demand to stop”. A judge ordered Vladimir Kara-Murza’s “administrative arrest” for 15 days for “disobeying police orders”. He was due to be released on 26 April.

However, on 22 April, Vladimir Kara-Murza’s lawyer was informed of a criminal case against his client under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code. On the same day, a court placed Kara-Murza in pre-trial detention, and he was formally charged.² The basis for the criminal charges against Vladimir Kara-Murza was his speech at the Arizona House of Representatives (in the USA) on 15 March³, in which he criticized Vladimir Putin’s policies, denounced what he called the West’s “appeasement” of the Kremlin and highlighted the importance of the protest movement in Russia.

Judging by the documents of the criminal case available to Amnesty International, it appears that the specific part of the speech that triggered the prosecution was: “Today, the whole world sees what the Putin regime is doing to Ukraine. The cluster bombs on residential areas, the bombing of maternity wards and hospitals and schools—the war crimes, these are war crimes that are being committed by the dictatorial regime in the Kremlin against a nation in the middle of Europe”.

Kara-Murza’s observations of ongoing violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Russian military are supported by evidence collected and verified by Amnesty International and other international mechanisms. Nevertheless, the Russian authorities reliance on criminal law under the pretext of addressing misinformation or “false news” is an attempt to hinder the right of people to seek and impart information which is a contravention of international human rights law.

Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code effectively criminalizes the act of criticizing or sharing information about the Russian armed forces and their violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The article’s intentionally broad and

¹ Bellingcat, “Vladimir Kara-Murza Tailed by Members of FSB Squad Prior to Suspected Poisonings”, 11 February 2021, [bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/02/11/vladimir-kara-murza-tailed-by-members-of-fsb-squad-prior-to-suspected-poisonings](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/02/11/vladimir-kara-murza-tailed-by-members-of-fsb-squad-prior-to-suspected-poisonings)

² See also: Amnesty International, “Russia: Prominent opposition activist faces up to 15 years in prison for sharing information about the war in Ukraine”, 22 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/russia-prominent-opposition-activist-faces-up-to-15-years-in-prison-for-sharing-information-about-the-war-in-ukraine](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/russia-prominent-opposition-activist-faces-up-to-15-years-in-prison-for-sharing-information-about-the-war-in-ukraine)

³ Arizona House GOP, “Russian Opposition Leader Vladimir Kara-Murza Addresses the Arizona House of Representatives”, 16 March 2022, youtu.be/9GY1srohskk, minute 8:56

vague definitions allow arbitrary application and serve to silence public debate around the war in Ukraine. It violates the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information, that is guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Russian Constitution. Article 207.3 must be repealed, charges against all those prosecuted under it must be dropped and they must be provided with effective remedy, including through immediate and unconditional release of those detained.

Amnesty International's Prisoner of Conscience determination is based on the information available to Amnesty International regarding the circumstances leading to the person's detention. In naming a person as a Prisoner of Conscience, Amnesty International is affirming that this person must be immediately and unconditionally released, but is not endorsing past or present views or conduct by them.