

PUBLIC

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Possible "disappearance"/
Fear of torture or ill-treatment

20 September 2000

UKRAINE

Georgiy Gongadze, journalist

Independent journalist Georgiy Gongadze has been missing since 16 September. Amnesty International believes he may have been secretly detained either by the authorities or by one of the powerful interests he has offended with his journalism, and that he is at risk of torture, ill-treatment or "disappearance".

Georgiy Gongadze reportedly left a friend's house on Lesya Ukrayinka Boulevard, in the capital, Kiev, at around 10.20pm, but failed to return home to his wife and two three-year-old children. His wife and friends reportedly contacted hospitals and emergency centres in the city to try to find him.

Georgiy Gongadze is the head of the internet newspaper *Ukrayinskaya Pravda* (Ukrainian Truth). *Ukrayinskaya Pravda* is reportedly one of a few media outlets that have been highly critical of the government and its alleged links with corrupt big business.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Georgiy Gongadze had complained that police had threatened and intimidated him because of his work as a journalist. In June 2000 he reportedly wrote an open letter to the Procurator General after he was forced into hiding by police harassment. He has also alleged that his colleagues at *Ukrayinskaya Pravda* have been harassed repeatedly.

Ukraine has been frequently faced international criticism for its lack of genuine press freedom. The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) included the Ukrainian President, Leonid Kuchma, in its 1999 list of the world's 10 worst enemies of the press. In its 1999 country report on Ukraine, the CPJ stated: "Over the past several years, Ukrainian press freedom has deteriorated to such an extent that Ukraine, unlike even neighboring Belarus, now lacks any genuinely independent major news media".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Russian or your own language:

- expressing grave concern for the safety of Georgiy Gongadze, who has been missing since 16 September 2000;
- calling for an immediate, independent and thorough investigation to determine his whereabouts;
- urging that, if he is in police custody; he be given immediate access to his family and to legal representation;
- urging that he be protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that any criminal charges against Georgiy Gongadze be made public and that, if he is in custody, he be released immediately unless charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO: (Please note: we have experienced considerable problems sending faxes to Ukraine. Please send faxes manually, be very patient, if you hear a voice say 'fax' and wait until the recipient turns on the fax machine. If problems persist please send faxes to diplomatic representatives of Ukraine accredited to your country)

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Salutation: Dear President

Procurator General of Ukraine

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Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine

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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Ukraine accredited to your country
(which can also be found at the following website
<http://www.brama.com/ua-gov/diprep.html>)

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 November 2000.