

# URGENT ACTION

## SHAMAN SUBJECTED TO PUNITIVE PSYCHIATRY

On 23 September, the Supreme Court of Sakha (Yakutia), approved shaman Aleksandr Gabyshev's confinement to a psychiatric hospital and forcible treatment. He was then transferred to a "specialized" guarded hospital in Novosibirsk, 4,850 kilometres away by road. The shaman has long faced persecution for publicly criticizing President Vladimir Putin, including repeated arbitrary arrests, humiliating searches, and psychiatric confinement.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Minister of Health  
Mikhail Murashko**

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CC: [pochta-upch@nso.ru](mailto:pochta-upch@nso.ru) (local Ombudsperson)

Dear Minister,

*I am urging you to intervene to stop the use of punitive psychiatry against resident of Yakutsk **Aleksandr Gabyshev**, 52-year-old resident of Yakutsk. An open critic of President Vladimir Putin, he has long faced persecution for exercising his right to freedom of expression and his peaceful activism, and has been subjected to repeated arbitrary arrests, humiliating searches, and psychiatric confinement. On 26 July 2021, Yakutsk City Court ruled to confine him to a psychiatric institution and authorized his forcible treatment. This decision was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Sakha (Yakutia) on 23 September. On 25 September, Aleksandr Gabyshev was placed at Novosibirsk Specialized Intensive Supervision Psychiatric Hospital.*

*According to international law and standards, deprivation of liberty on grounds of mental illness is unjustified if not strictly necessary to protect the safety of the person or of others. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which Russia is a State party, forbids the deprivation of liberty based on the existence of any disability, including mental or intellectual. Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on torture has said that medical treatment administered in the absence of free and informed consent may amount to torture or other ill-treatment.*

*Based on Aleksandr Gabyshev's history of harassment by the authorities, it is abundantly clear that his confinement and compulsory psychiatric treatment is not only unnecessary but that it serves the sole purpose of retaliation for his peaceful activism since 2018 and his public criticism of Vladimir Putin.*

***I call on you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Aleksandr Gabyshev is not subjected to punitive psychiatry, including medical treatment administered in the absence of his free and informed consent, and that the decision on his confinement in a psychiatric institution is immediately reversed.***

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 23 September, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) rejected Aleksandr Gabyshev's appeal against an earlier court decision to confine him indefinitely in a psychiatric institution and authorizing his forcible treatment.

Aleksandr Gabyshev is a shaman who is known for declaring in 2019, to walk 8,500 kilometres from Yakutsk to Moscow to use his shamanic powers "to purge" President Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin. Weeks later and after walking hundreds of kilometres, Aleksandr Gabyshev was arbitrarily arrested by police in September 2019 and placed in a psychiatric institution but soon released and placed under surveillance, and named a suspect under Article 280(1) of the Criminal Code ("public calls for extremist activities"). He tried to walk to Moscow once again, and was again arbitrarily arrested in May 2020, allegedly for refusing to be tested for Covid-19. He was examined by psychiatrists and found to be "suffering from over-valuing of his own personality" in connection with his declared intention "to harm the government." He was released on 22 July 2020, following a public outcry in Russia and internationally.

On 27 January 2021, days after Aleksandr Gabyshev had announced preparations for another march to Moscow, his home was raided by some 50 law enforcement officers reportedly led by the Deputy Interior Minister of Yakutia. A video of his violent apprehension is available online: <https://youtu.be/IRxGljC3wb4>. In it, his small home is seen being raided by a squad of special police in full riot gear, and the shaman himself is handcuffed lying face-down on the floor in a puddle of blood with a bloody wound on his head. The pretext for the raid was Aleksandr Gabyshev not attending an appointment with a psychiatrist in connection with his purported mental health condition. Police claim that during his apprehension, Aleksandr Gabyshev drew a ceremonial Yakut sword and caused an injury (small cut) to one of the officers. On 2 February, Yakutsk City Court ruled to confine him to a psychiatric institution for medical examination, and three weeks later, the Investigative Committee announced that he was officially charged with making "calls for extremism" and "using violence against police officers". On 18 March, medical experts announced that he was diagnosed with a mental health issue which required hospitalization and treatment. On 26 July, Yakutsk City Court ruled to place Aleksandr Gabyshev at a psychiatric institution for an indefinite period, while the investigation under the above-mentioned allegations was still ongoing.

Two days after the Supreme Court of Sakha (Yakutia) upheld the decision on his confinement and forcible treatment, Aleksandr Gabyshev was transferred to the Novosibirsk Specialized Intensive Supervision Psychiatric Hospital, which is a closed institution for "mentally ill male persons who have committed socially dangerous acts and [who], due to their psychiatric state, pose particular danger to themselves and other persons and who require constant and intense supervision" (see the website of the hospital here: <http://npbstin.ru/>).

The distance between Novosibirsk and Yakutsk is 2,700 kilometres, but it is a 4,850 kilometre-long drive, which makes any visits by family members, friends or his lawyer an expensive and lengthy endeavour. His lawyer was not informed of his transfer from Yakutsk to Novosibirsk directly or in good time. The defence team plan to seek a review of the decision on Aleksandr Gabyshev's psychiatric confinement via cassation appeal.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Russian, English, Yakut

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 2 December 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Aleksandr Gabyshev (he/his)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4737/2021/en/>