

ANNOUNCING THE LAUNCH OF THE COALITION TO FREE THE KREMLIN'S POLITICAL PRISONERS

Moscow, Russia; Washington, D.C.; Ottawa, Canada; Kyiv, Ukraine; Berlin, Germany; Tallinn, Estonia – We are pleased to announce the creation of the Coalition to Free the Kremlin's Political Prisoners.

The Coalition is currently comprised of a dozen Russian domestic and international civil society organizations from around the world. We expect other organizations to join over time.

The purpose of the Coalition is to organize and coordinate collective actions among its members to press for the release of the Kremlin's political prisoners. According to the Memorial Human Rights Center, which applies the Council of Europe's definition, Russian authorities currently hold 235 political prisoners, with some of the most commonly targeted groups including human rights defenders, business opponents, journalists, bloggers, critics of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, religious and ethnic minorities, and anyone who dares to express political dissent.

The Kremlin's political prisoners include:

- Alexey Pichugin, Russia's longest-serving political prisoner, having served more than 15 years in prison of a life sentence after being framed for several murders and attempted murders. The European Court of Human Rights found multiple fair trial and presumption of innocence violations in two separate trials, and ordered new trials, but these orders have been ignored by the Kremlin. In reality, his was the first arrest in the Yukos case, and he remains in prison because he refuses to implicate its major shareholders for crimes neither they nor he committed.
- Oleg Sentsov, a Crimean film-maker and activist who was sentenced in 2015 to 20 years' imprisonment on false terrorism and weapons charges. One of the key witnesses recanted his prior statement implicating Sentsov, insisting that it had been made under duress and underscoring the unfair and politically motivated nature of the charges against him. Despite being a Ukrainian citizen who was arrested in Crimea, Sentsov was transferred to and faced trial in Russia, in clear violation of international law. Sentsov gained worldwide attention through a 145-day hunger strike demanding the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners held by the Kremlin.
- Anastasia Shevchenko, a human rights activist and Coordinator with the Open Russia movement, who was charged on January 21, 2019 with "repeated participation in the activities of an undesirable organization" (Criminal Code Article 284.1) and subsequently placed under house arrest. Shevchenko is the first person to be criminally prosecuted under this provision, which allows Russian authorities to restrict the work of foreign organizations deemed "undesirable." While detained, she was denied access to her daughter, who had been hospitalized. Shevchenko was only granted permission to see her hours before she passed away. The persecution against her inspired a "March of Mothers' Fury," in which thousands of supporters demanded the liberation of political prisoners. She faces up to six years in prison.
- Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen and Jehovah's Witness who has been detained since May 25, 2017. He is accused of organizing an "extremist" group – a local chapter of Jehovah's

Witnesses. Christensen was one of first victims of the government's increasing persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, which has only intensified since the Supreme Court designated the religion's Administrative Center in Russia as an "extremist organization" in 2017. There currently are at least 62 Jehovah's Witnesses being prosecuted on extremism charges in Russia.

- Oyub Titiev, a human rights activist and the head of Memorial Human Rights Centre in Chechnya. He was arrested in January 2018 when marijuana was allegedly found during a search of his car. However, Titiev insists – and leading human rights organization agree – that the drugs were planted in retaliation for his (and Memorial's) human rights work.
- Yan Sidorov, a college student who has been detained since November 2017. He is accused of attempting to organize "mass riots" after he and a friend merely tried to organize a small group demanding the resignation of the regional government. They made two posters and about 30 flyers and purchased one megaphone. Their attempts to engage in political speech – clearly protected under international human rights law – could be punished with over a decade in prison if convicted.
- Svyatoslav Bobyshev, a former professor who is currently serving a 12-year sentence for treason for allegedly giving information about a missile system to China during an academic collaboration in 2009. The allegedly secret information was not secret at the time when he handed it over, however, but was classified as secret retroactively.

The work of the Coalition will supplement and enhance the work of individual Coalition members and is aimed at raising the profile of the Kremlin's political prisoners and placing increasing pressure on the current Russian authorities to release them.

The Coalition arose from the need for sustained and consistent international pressure on the Kremlin to free its political prisoners. In recent years, the Kremlin has waged a brutal and systematic campaign to crush civil society in Russia and stifle dissent both within its borders and beyond. One of its preferred methods of repression is to arrest and detain political opponents on spurious criminal charges.

Domestic and international organizations and advocates have worked tirelessly to secure the release of the Kremlin's political prisoners, but so far these efforts have had only limited success. The Kremlin has repeatedly dismissed, downplayed, or ignored calls by international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations to release political prisoners.

In light of the Kremlin's resistance to advocacy on behalf of political prisoners, a common and coordinated advocacy strategy on political prisoners is needed now more than ever. The Coalition aims to fill this need by speaking with one voice and urging concerted action.

The members of the Coalition to Free the Kremlin's Political Prisoners are:

1. Action for Post-Soviet Jewry (United States)
2. Activatica.org (Estonia)
3. Article 20 (Russia)
4. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
5. Euromaidan SOS (Ukraine)
6. Free Russia Foundation (United States, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia)

7. Human Rights Foundation (United States)
8. Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice (United States)
9. McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University (United States)
10. Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (Canada)
11. Solidarus (Germany)
12. Union of Council for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (United States)

The Coalition is being facilitated by Vladimir Kara-Murza, Chairman, Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom; David J. Kramer, former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State and current Senior Fellow, Václav Havel Program on Human Rights and Diplomacy, Florida International University; Natalia Arno, President of Free Russia Foundation; and Oleksandra Matviichuk, Center for Civil Liberties and Euromaidan SOS.

There will be much more presented by the new Coalition in the coming weeks and months ahead. For further information, please contact:

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