

Warsaw, dated 21.06.2018

Prof. dr hab. Jacek Czaputowicz
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Aleja Jana Chrystiana Szucha 23
00-580 Warszawa

Dear Sir,

On 9 January 2018, in Chechnya, Oyub Titiev, chairman of a local branch of the Russian organisation "Memorial" Human Rights Defence Centre, was arrested. Titiev's car was stopped and searched, and during the search – in the opinion of lawyers, NGOs, and independent media – drugs were planted on him.

Oyub Titiev brought help to victims of serious violations of human rights – torture, forced disappearances, he also helped families of persons killed by services connected to the republic's authorities. For the last few months before his arrest, Titiev and other Memorial workers dealt with the well-known case of 27 residents of the republic who were arrested and then vanished (probably shot). Titiev's lawyers point out to numerous and blatant breaches during the arrest and proceedings. The prosecution has not presented any credible evidence that a crime has been committed so far. Despite this, Titiev is still under arrest, exposed to torture (which according to the reports available are commonly used in Chechen prisons), he is threatened by a high imprisonment penalty.

Amnesty International considered Oyub Titiev to be a prisoner of conscience because he had been arrested exclusively for exercising his rights peacefully and for his human rights work. Already over 2,200 persons in Poland signed Amnesty International's petition concerning the Chechen human rights defender.

Oyub Titiev is not the only prisoner of conscience in contemporary Russia. Lists of the Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre include currently as many as 158 political prisoners and 77 persons who have very likely been arrested for political reasons. At the same time, Memorial points out the fact that those lists do not include all of the repressed persons because the true number of political prisoners and people deprived of freedom for political reasons in today's Russia is undoubtedly much higher.

According to the available reports from NGOs, Ukrainian nationals also create a large group of people illegally imprisoned by the authorities of the Russian Federation. NGOs have information about 71 Ukrainian citizens whose persecution may be deemed politically motivated. During the times when countries openly celebrate the opening of the World Cup, in one of the penal colonies a Ukrainian national, Oleg Sentsov, has been on a hunger strike for a month, demanding that all Ukrainian political prisoners are released. He was convicted for 20 years of imprisonment. He has announced that he intends to continue his hunger strike until he dies.

On 18 January 2018, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights issued a letter to you, requesting that the Polish authorities take a stance with regard to the arrest of Oyub Titiev. We have no knowledge of any activities undertaken as a result.

Due to the fact that the representation of Poland is currently taking part in the World Cup, held in Russia this year, we would like to appeal to you to undertake actions to ensure the protection of human rights by the authorities of the Russian Federation, including attempts made to free all persons imprisoned for political reasons.

In our opinion, the lack of response and the failure to bring up human rights issues during the World Cup is in fact a permission given to the violation of these rights by the Russian Federation. **We believe that Polish authorities have a moral and ethical obligation to broach this subject, including the matter of freeing Titiev, Sentsov and other illegally imprisoned persons.** The Republic of Poland is known known for its activity in support of freedom and international solidarity, and has repeatedly acted in defence of persecuted persons.

We recognise that the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution on freeing Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia. This is a good first step, but this **effort should be undertaken by all authorities, in cooperation with other countries, and they should refer to all political prisoners.** The authorities of the Russian Federation should be called to observe national and international obligations concerning human rights, including the freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of assembly. Therefore, we would like to appeal to you to support international actions in support of freeing Oyub Titiev, Oleg Sentsov, and all other persons arrested or convicted for political reasons by the Russian Federation. We are counting on your reply and publicising of the Ministry's actions in Polish media.

Yours sincerely,

Polish members of the Forum of Civic Society of the European Union and Russia:

Citizens Network Watchdog Poland
For Free Russia Association
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Homo Faber Association
Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe
KARTA Center Foundation
Institute for Public Affairs
Stefan Batory Foundation

And other organisations with fates of human rights defenders at heart:

Amnesty International
Autonomia Foundation
ePaństwo Foundation
Other Space Foundation
Kaukaz.net Foundation
Foundation for Equality and Emancipation STER
Our Choice Foundation
Panoptikon Foundation
Field of Dialogue Foundation
Foundation for Positive Changes
„Różnosfera” Foundation
School for Leaders Foundation
School with Class Foundation
Grupa Zagranica - Polish platform of 54 civil society organizations engaged in development cooperation, democracy support, humanitarian aid and global education.
Open House
Institute for Law and Society INPRIS
Lubuskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Kobiet Baba Association
Polish Migration Forum Foundation
Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law
Unit for Social Innovation and Research “Shipyard”
Professor Zbigniew Hołda Association.
Stanisław Brzozowski Association
Association of Grassroots Activities „RzeczJasna”
Association of Women Initiatives
Association for Legal Intervention (SIP)
Klon/Jawor Association
NOMADA Association for Multicultural Society Integration
Association for Sustainable Social Development "FAIR Society"
Society Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia „Open Republic”
Love Does Not Exclude Association