

Stop making up lawsuits against human rights defenders in Ural!
Free human rights defender Alekseï Sokolov now

We protest firmly against the recent chase by the police forces of Ural of human rights defenders that have actively denounced prisoners' rights violations. We have reasons to consider this as an attempt to "prevent" public protests from occurring during the Shanghai Organization for Collaboration summit in Ekaterinburg (July 2009). Yet, the contrary is more likely to happen. The arrest of persons, known for their political activism, reinforces indignation in the society and draws additional disappointment regarding justice.

Alekseï Sokolov, human rights defender in Ekaterinburg has been arrested on May, 13 at 9am by four police officers from the main Direction of Domestic Affairs of the Sverdlovsk region. Alekseï Sokolov had been nominated member of the civil commission of control by the Chamber of Deputies. According to the militia, Alekseï has been party to the armed assault at the production site "OuralTermoSvar" where a welding machine and wire were stolen in Bogdanovich in 2004.

The arrest was violent; he was beaten, dashed to the ground, handcuffed. His two-year-old daughter, uprooted from his arms, witnessed the whole scene, shocked. Then, the members of the militia tried to body search his wife Goul'nara, who went out to join her husband. Alekseï Sokolov had been watched for several hours.

Why organizing such a pathetic parody of an action movie scene? To intimidate him? To trigger protest actions? To discredit police forces? They could have simply summoned this public figure, head of the organization "juridical foundation", since the assault related investigations have been lasting for four years.

For a long time, Sokolov was afraid that such a provocation was being prepared and that prisoners were asked to make false testimonies against him. Alekseï declared it publicly in the mainstream media. The police investigations against him had been interrupted at the beginning of this year, and then started over suddenly. Several convicted persons for the 2004 assault case let the human rights defenders know they were threatened and feared abuses aimed at obtaining testimonies against Sokolov. Knowing this, Alexeï Sokolov called the prosecution on behalf of the organization "juridical foundation".

Alexeï Solokov is known for having screened the movie "torture manufacturing" based on documentary materials: prisons guards trainings; reporting on the murder civil investigations; retaliation of the people arrested in Kopeisk, on May, 31, 2008 (and other cases of abuses in

detention places). The movie also included investigation documents of the recent tragedy at the night club “Hollywood” in Pervoural’sk, where the responsibility of members of the militia that did not maintain public order, causing the death of several teenagers in the scramble, has been proved.

On May, 14, the Verhne-Isetsy district court of Ekaterinburg convicted Alexei Sokolov to a 10 day sentence.

We are convinced that an accusation founded on events that took place more than 5 years ago serves specific purposes. The court decision to arrest the human rights defender Alexei Sokolov is motivated by his civil and professional activity. Therefore, **we consider Alexei Sokolov as being a political prisoner and demand his immediate release.**

On April, 29, in Tseliabinsk, two employees of the militia broke into Juri Skogarev’s house, another human rights defender involved in the Kopeisk tragedy investigations. They tried to arrest him without giving any motive other than the participation of Skogarev to the rights defense movement.

We demand the lawsuits against human rights defenders to be stopped and ask for those responsible of the repressions and of making up charges to be judged.

We demand the immediate release of Alexei Sokolov!

We demand that the Federation powers takes care of local acts of provocation that exacerbate political and civil tensions and destroy the dialogue between the State and civil society.

L.M. Alexeeva, President of the Helsinki Group in Moscow

L.A. Ponomarev, Executive Director of the movement « For Human Rights » in Russia

Vladimir Chakléine, Inter-regional Center of Human Rights in Oural

Sergueï Beliaév, President of the organization “Soutiazhnik”

Dmitri Rozhine, member of the control civil commission

Alexei Sokolov is a human rights defender who works actively with the Center of human rights defense in Russia and with Amnesty International. He participated to the denunciation of torture, ill-treatment and death in detention, in prison and temporary detention centers in the Sverdlosk region. Working within the “Pravovia osnova” association, he obtained several investigations to be started on police officers and personal members of penitentiary camps that have committed abuses against the detainees.

Alexei was part of the federal commission of detention places control. Within this legal framework, several accounts on human rights violations cases in penitentiary system organs were reported. He had already been attacked and threatened several times by representatives of the police forces. Arrested on May 13, 2009, after fake investigations started on April 23, he suffered an illegal repressive treatment. Alexei was placed in a cell with two detainees, members of the internal order section, which is known for having put pressure on detainees leading them to commit suicide. On May 26, Alexei started a hunger strike asking to be moved away from these people. Since his arrest, he has been threatened several times by members of the preparatory instruction house. Given the nature of the investigations and his militant activity, Alexei Sokolov is currently at risk of torture.