

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST SENTENCED ON FABRICATED CHARGES

Civil society activist Ruslan Kutaev has been sentenced to four years imprisonment following an unfair trial in Russia. He is a prisoner of conscience, and was allegedly tortured to force him to confess to possessing illegal drugs.

On 7 July 2014 **Ruslan Kutaev** was sentenced to four years imprisonment and one additional year of being banned from attending public assemblies and participating in public events. The charges against him are believed to be fabricated to punish him for his activism. Ruslan Kutaev was convicted in an unfair trial, and his allegations of torture have not been investigated.

Ruslan Kutaev was arrested in Gekhi in the Chechen Republic, Russian Federation, on 20 February 2014 on allegations of possessing heroin. Two days prior to his arrest he participated in a conference, which he co-organised, commemorating the deportation of the Chechen people by Stalin's regime in 1944. Those who attended the conference were summoned and reprimanded by the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov the following day.. He has no history of drug use, and there are frequent allegations that police plant drugs on detainees in Russia in order to justify their arrest and subsequent prosecution.

According to Ruslan Kutaev's lawyer, before he was taken to a police station, he was tortured in a building of the Presidential Administration in the centre of Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic, to extort his confession. He was also threatened that his family would be at risk if he did not confess. A medical report, video footage of Ruslan Kutaev in detention, and testimonies from a member of a human rights NGO and Ruslan Kutaev's lawyer, who visited him in detention, confirmed that he was severely bruised and a broken rib. Despite formal complaints concerning the use of torture to extort his confession, these allegations were never investigated. The trial was marred by numerous irregularities in the testimonies of witnesses for the prosecution and the apparent disregard of evidence from the defence. Ruslan Kutaev's lawyer confirmed that they intend to appeal the decision.

Please write immediately in Russian, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Ruslan Kutaev immediately and unconditionally;
- Demand that they conduct an immediate, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, and the alleged fabrication of evidence against him.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 AUGUST 2014 TO:

Prosecutor General

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
15a, Bolshaya Dmitrovka street
125993 Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 58 41; +7 495 692 17
25

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Chairman of the Investigative Committee

Aleksandr Ivanovich Bastrykin
Investigative Committee of the Russian
Federation
2, Tekhnicheskii pereulok
105005 Moscow, Russian Federation
Fax: +7499 265 90 77; +7499 265 97 75

Salutation: Dear Chairman

And copies to:

Head of the Chechen Republic
Ramzan Akhmadovich Kadyrov
10, Garazhnaia, street
Grozny 364000 Republic of Chechnya
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 8712 223085 (if answered,
please say "FAX" or "PREEMEETI FAX")

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 66/14. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/023/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ruslan Kutaev is a well-known civil society activist and human rights defender from the Chechen Republic in the North Caucasus, in the Russian Federation.

On 23 February 1944, the entire ethnic Chechen population was forcibly transported from the Caucasus to Central Asia and other distant parts of the then Soviet Union as a punitive measure for its purported support of the occupying German forces during the Second World War. Many other ethnic groups in the Caucasus shared this fate. Scores of people died as a result, and they were not allowed to return until after Stalin's death.

The Head (President) of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, reportedly ordered that no activities commemorating the victims of the deportation were to be held this year. In other North Caucasus republics, such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, commemorative events were deferred to 24 February or also forbidden by local authorities. Whereas there has been no official explanation for this, independent commentators suggested that this was to avoid such events coinciding with the official closing ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi.

In spite of the warnings, on 18 February Ruslan Kutaev and other activists and scholars held a conference titled "The deportation of the Chechen people. What it was and whether it is possible to forget?" The next day, those who took part in the conference were summoned by a senior member of Ramzan Kadyrov's administration for a meeting at which he reportedly verbally reprimanded them. Ruslan Kutaev was the only one who did not go.

On the day of his arrest he called the head of the human rights NGO Committee Against Torture just two hours prior to his arrest and stated that pressure against him was mounting after the conference and he expected to be arrested soon. On 20 February, Ruslan Kutaev was arrested in Gekhi in the Chechen Republic, by a group of some 20 armed men, among whom reportedly were Ramzan Kadyrov's personal security guards and men with no identifying insignia, during an alleged "random check". However, during court hearings, the police officers who detained him reportedly contradicted each other on the circumstances of his detention. Also, one of the witnesses for the prosecution reportedly stated that Ruslan Kutaev was not detained on the street, as the police had claimed, but in the backyard of his house.

According to Ruslan Kutaev's lawyer, after his arrest he was taken to a building of the Presidential Administration in the centre of Grozny, where he was placed in a cellar, undressed, beaten, and tortured using electric shocks. He was also threatened that his family would be at risk if he did not confess. A member of the NGO Committee against Torture was able to visit Ruslan Kutaev three days after his arrest and documented his severe bruising. Amnesty International has also seen video footage taken in custody, in which Ruslan Kutaev can be seen with large bruises on his body and a rib sticking out under his skin. Ruslan Kutaev informed his lawyers that he is suffering from severe pain in his head and jaw. A medical report issued on 13 March stated that one of his ribs was fractured. According to Ruslan Kutaev's lawyer, after his arrest members of his family continued to receive threats.

Whereas the Chechen Ministry of the Interior has claimed that Ruslan Kutaev was detained on suspicion of possessing illegal drugs, a few days after his arrest Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly stated on television that he had been arrested because of his involvement in an unauthorized conference in memory of the victims of deportations from the Caucasus under Stalin.

Name: Ruslan Kutaev
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 66/14 Index: EUR 46/043/2014 Issue Date: 11 July 2014