

CHECHNYA: IMMEDIATELY RELEASE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OYUB TITIEV

10 January 2018

We, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), are deeply concerned at reports of the arrest of Oyub Titiev, head of Human Rights Center Memorial's Grozny office in Chechnya on highly dubious narcotics charges. We call for his immediate and unconditional release and dropping of all charges.

Titiev is highly respected in the international human rights community, as well as in the North Caucasus, where he is part of a small group of brave human rights defenders still working to uncover and document grave ongoing human rights violations. Titiev has led Memorial's work in Chechnya since the horrific murder of his colleague Natalia Estemirova in 2009. In recent years, he received numerous threats aimed at making him quit human rights work. Now, his life and safety are in jeopardy.

According to reports, Oyub Titiev was brought to the Kurchaloi district police department shortly after his car was stopped and searched near the Khymuk bridge around 10:30 am on Tuesday 9 January. Titiev's lawyer has been informed that he is being charged with the illegal possession of drugs, reportedly a large amount (180 grams) of marijuana.

Similar trumped-up charges have previously led to several years' imprisonment for activists and independent journalists in Chechnya. Framing people for drug crimes has become an increasingly frequent tactic used by Chechnya's authorities to punish and discredit their critics in the eyes of Chechen society.

The Civic Solidarity Platform is a network of more than 90 human rights organizations working across the OSCE region. We consider the suggestion that a highly experienced human rights defender such as 60 year-old Oyub Titiev would travel around Chechnya with any amount of drugs in his car to be absurd, and to be evidence only of the tactics employed by Chechen authorities against principled and hard-working human rights defenders. We believe Chechen authorities are seeking to frame Titiev and close down the extremely important work of Human Rights Center Memorial in the region by means of threats and harassment.

Russia is under an obligation to respect and enable the work of human rights defenders. An important resolution in the UN General Assembly – adopted by consensus on 24 December 2017 – *“Calls upon States to take concrete steps to prevent and put an end to arbitrary arrest and detention, including of human rights defenders, and in this regard strongly urges the release of persons detained or imprisoned, in violation of the obligations and commitments of States under international human rights law, for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including in relation to cooperation with the United Nations or other international mechanisms in the area of human rights”*.

The undersigned members of the Civic Solidarity Platform call on Chechen authorities as well as central Russian authorities to immediately release Oyub Titiev and stop his persecution as we believe that he is being punished solely in retaliation for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Furthermore, we call on authorities to ensure the safety of Memorial staff in Chechnya. Furthermore, we call on authorities not to hinder but to assist brave individuals such as Titiev in their work to uncover grave human rights violations in the North Caucasus region.

We call on international organizations and foreign governments to follow Titiev's case closely and to bring our concerns to the attention of the authorities in the Russian Federation. Russia must abide by its international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments.

Signed:

Albanian Helsinki Committee (Albania)
Article 19 (United Kingdom)
Association UMPDL (Ukraine)
Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (Lithuania)
Belarusian Helsinki Committee (Belarus)
Bir Duino (Kyrgyzstan)
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (Bulgaria)
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
Centre de la Protection Internationale (France)
Citizens' Watch (Russia)
Committee Against Torture (Russia)
Crude Accountability (USA)
Freedom Files (Poland/Russia)
Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims-GCRT (Georgia)
German-Russian Exchange (Germany)
Helsinki Association Armenia (Armenia)
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor (Armenia)
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (Serbia)
Helsinki Committee of Armenia (Armenia)
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan)
Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)
Human Rights Matter (Germany)
Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
IDP Women Association Consent (Georgia)
Index on Censorship (United Kingdom)
Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)

International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
International Protection Center (Russia)
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)
Kharkiv Regional Foundation Public Alternative (Ukraine)
Legal Transformation Center (Belarus)
Macedonian Helsinki Committee (Macedonia)
Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
Netherlands Helsinki Committee (Netherlands)
Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)
Notabene (Tajikistan)
OMCT – World Organisation Against Torture (Switzerland)
Office of Civil Freedoms (Tajikistan)
Promo LEX Association (Moldova)
Protection of Rights Without Borders (Armenia)
Public Association Dignity (Kazakhstan)
Public Verdict (Russia)
Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Azerbaijan/Georgia)
Solidarus (Germany)
Truth Hounds (Ukraine)
Women of the Don (Russia)