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Russia: Human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov detained for sharing links to Facebook-based content declared as “extremist” in Russia

On 8 July 2024, Leninsky District Court in the city of Yekaterinburg, Russia, placed human rights defender **Aleksei Sokolov** under pre-trial detention until 1 September 2024. The human rights defender is being accused of “repeated demonstration of extremist symbols”, a criminal offence envisioned by part 1 of Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Particularly, he is being targeted for posting links to Facebook on his Telegram channel; in 2022, the Russian Federation listed Meta, including Facebook and Instagram, as an extremist organization. If found guilty, Aleksei Sokolov can be sentenced to 4 years in prison.

[Aleksei Sokolov](#) is a human rights defender from Yekaterinburg, Russia, and the head of the human rights organization “Legal Basis.” For over 20 years, he has been protecting the rights of prisoners and documenting the violation of rights of the imprisoned population in Russia. He has used his Telegram-based media to bring attention to human rights abuses in detention centres.

On 8 July, 2024, the Leninsky District Court in the city of Yekaterinburg, Russia, placed human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov under pre-trial detention until 1 September 2024. The trial lasted two days and was closed to the public and to the press at the request of the investigators. Over the course of the trial, the human rights defender was placed in a temporary detention ward. Aleksei Sokolov was first detained in 5 July 2024, after law enforcement officers raided his apartment in Yekaterinburg, and subjected him to physical violence, including beatings, threats, and harassment. The human rights defender reported that the law enforcement officers failed to inform him for the reasons of his detention. The video of Alexei Sokolov’s apartments’ raid was published after the raid by pro-governmental online media outlets. The authorities seized a number of documents, including an authority form to UN treaty bodies.

The human rights defender is being accused of “repeated demonstration of extremist symbols”, a criminal offence envisioned by part 1 of Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Particularly, he is being targeted for allegedly posting links to Facebook, and posting a logo in the Telegram-based channel “Human Rights Defenders of the Ural Region.” In 2022, the Russian Federation listed Meta, including Facebook and Instagram, as an extremist organization and has since exposed many social media users to potential administrative and criminal prosecutions. In October 2023, Aleksei Sokolov was the first ever person to be sentenced to 5 days of detention for this, after his aforementioned alleged Telegram channel posts. He was found guilty of “demonstration of extremist symbols”, which, as a first-time offence is regulated by part 1, Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation.

The investigation alleged that Aleksei Sokolov posted 29 different links to Facebook in the “Human Rights Defenders of the Ural Region” channel, thereby distributing extremist symbols. The human rights defender shared in his letter that the prosecution is accusing him of having “circulated untrue information about the penitentiary system” through the Facebook links that he was accused of sharing. Aleksei Sokolov stated that he was about to reveal a CCTV recording of the violence and torture that law enforcement officers exercised against a detainee. He also stated that when his house was raided, the authorities addressed him by saying “we are fed up with you.”

Front Line Defenders expresses grave concern with the raid and subsequent detention of human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov, as it believes he is being persecuted for his legitimate and

peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders continues to raise its concern with the Russian authorities continued use of “security laws” in order to silence and persecute human rights defenders within the country. Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned with the intensive targeting of human rights defenders in Russia, whose sole aim is to promote human rights and document human rights violations.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Russian Federation to

1. Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Aleksei Sokolov from custody, ensuring his physical and psychological safety;
2. Drop all of the charges against Aleksei Sokolov;
3. Cease the use of security laws to target human rights defenders for their non-violent and legitimate human rights work in Russia;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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