



31 May 2021

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

Street address:

79 Myrtle Street

Chippendale

NSW 2008

T: (02) 83967618

E: exec.admin@amnesty.org.au

ABN 64 002 806 233

Postal address:

Locked bag 23

Broadway

NSW 2007

F: (02) 83967677

W: www.amnesty.org.au

Dear Minister Payne

RE: PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE NIKOLAI PLATOSHKIN'S SUSPENDED CONVICTION

The recent suspended conviction of Russian prisoner of conscience, Nikolai Platoshkin, and the forced dissolution of Otkrytaya Rossiya (Open Russia Movement), underscore the threats to the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in Russia. In light of this threat, **Amnesty International's 10 million global supporters urge your government to join our call for Russian authorities to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil their human rights obligations.**

Nikolai Platoshkin

Prisoner of conscience, Nikolai Platoshkin joins the ranks of peaceful activists convicted on politically-motivated charges meant to silence dissent.

Former diplomat, and renowned opposition activist Nikolai Platoshkin has been convicted on absurd charges of "incitement to commit mass disorder" and "dissemination of false information." On 19 May, the Gagarinsky District Court of Moscow sentenced him to a five-year suspended imprisonment and a fine of 700,000 rubles (US\$9,500). The fact that this conviction bars Platoshkin from running for elected office promotes an inescapable suggestion of political motivations behind these charges.

Platoshkin's sentencing constitutes a move by Russian authorities to prevent his further participation in public life and punish his criticism of Putin's stranglehold on power. The absurdity of the charges, the speed of the court hearings, and the blatant disregard for fair trial proceedings sends a clear message to the Russian people that to express views critical of Russian authorities is to incite riots, and is thus illegal.

Framing peaceful protest as inciting "mass disorder" in this way poses a significant threat to the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

We have been closely following the case of Aleksei Navalny, another prominent opposition figure and anti-corruption campaigner, and were deeply concerned when he also was imprisoned in Russia without committing a recognisable criminal offence.

Despite significant protests from the international community, Navalny has not been released and no criminal investigation has been opened regarding his poisoning.

The continued imprisonment of Aleksei Navalny speaks to a prominent fear of prosecution faced by peaceful activists or any individual who has spoken out against Putin's government. The arrest of Platoshkin validates this anxiety further, and points to how reprisals for those critical of the Russian government continue to spread throughout the country in anticipation of September parliamentary elections.

I understand that your government has raised concerns about Navalny's case with Russian authorities, including tweeting on 19 January, and issuing a press release on 3 February. I urge you to extend this advocacy to Platoshkin and other political prisoners.

Open Russia Movement

Otkrytaya Rossiya (Open Russia Movement) has taken the decision to completely cease its activities and dissolve. According to Open Russia executive director Andrei Pivovarov, the decision to dissolve the movement was made to protect supporters from criminal prosecution given further tightening of the "undesirable organizations" legislation, which is being considered by the State Duma.

On 26 May, Yuri Sidorov, the former coordinator of Open Russia in the Republic of Chuvashia (Central Russia) was put on a wanted list on charges of "participating in the activities of an "undesirable organisation". The Russian authorities banned the UK-based organization Open Russia in April 2017, which led to widespread reprisals against the Russian group of the same name. Also on 26 May, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office added three German NGOs, Forum Russischsprachiger Europäer (Forum of Russian-Speaking Europeans), Zentrum für die Liberale Moderne (Center for Liberal Modernity) and Deutsch-Russischer Austausch (German-Russian Exchange) to the list of banned "undesirable organisations", bringing their total to 34.

The end of Open Russia means less pluralism across Russia's civic space, and the loss of another valuable member of the human rights community. Open Russia has shown its dedication and effectiveness against crushing state pressure to silence dissent. It is tragic that the group was forced to close to protect its members, due to an unjust law designed to crush critical voices.

The suspension and involuntary dissolution of an association are among the severest restrictions on the right to freedom of association, protected under article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The impact of insurmountable restrictions and the threat of criminal prosecution may amount to de facto dissolution of an association, in contravention of international human rights law and standards.

We urge the Australian government to raise these matters with the Russian authorities and stand opposed to this threat to human rights. The international community has the responsibility to reject the continued prosecution and silencing of peaceful activists in Russia and require the

immediate and unconditional release of Aleksei Navalny, Nikolai Platoshkin, and others imprisoned under political motivations, and to promote an open civil society that tolerates dissenting voices.

For further information, or to discuss and organise a meeting, please contact Joel MacKay at joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Klintworth', written in a cursive style.

Sam Klintworth
National Director
Amnesty International Australia