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| EUR 46/7964/2024 - Russian Federation - Date: 19 April 2024 | | |
| URGENT ACTION |  | UA 033/24 |
| Stop the inhumane treatment of Maria Ponomarenko in prison | | |
| RUSSIA | | |

The Russian authorities are putting the health and life of journalist Maria Ponomarenko at risk due to her treatment, and the conditions in detention, including being held in solitary confinement and not receiving adequate healthcare. Maria was sentenced to six years imprisonment solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maria Ponomarenko is an activist, blogger and a journalist from Barnaul, Altai Krai, who worked for the online media outlet RusNews. On 23 April 2022, she was arrested and detained by the police under Article 207.3 (2) (d) («Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the Russian Armed Forces committed with motives of hatred or enmity»). The «false information» she was accused of disseminating was a 17 March post (which has since been deleted) in her Telegram channel about the bombing of the Donetsk Regional Academic Drama Theatre in Mariupol by Russian forces the previous morning. It contained a video from the theatre made before the attack and a short comment denouncing civilian deaths. On 15 February 2023, a court in Barnaul, Altai Krai found Maria Ponomarenko guilty and sentenced her to six years imprisonment and a five-year ban on engaging in journalism upon her release. The sentence was upheld on appeal. While in prison, Maria was accused with being violent towards the prison officers (Article 321, part 2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), which she denies. Maria Ponomarenko is a Prisoner of Conscience imprisoned solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and must be released immediately and unconditionally. She is one of the key cases that Amnesty International will work on in 2024 within the «Protect the Protest» campaign.

During her time in the remand centre and penal colony, Maria reported various forms of mistreatment. During her time in pre-trial detention, she was unlawfully placed in a psychiatric hospital and a punishment cell, and also survived a mental breakdown and a suicide attempt. Earlier this year Maria shared a list of violations of the rights of women prisoners in the penal colonies in Krasnoyarsk region and Altai Krai to women’s rights campaign group she was part of.

In April 2024, it’s now the fourth time that Maria Ponomarenko has been sent to a punishment cell. Two of her previous placements in a solitary confinement were prompted by her ill-health: another was due to her fainting, and another one – for not being able to get up from her bed upon a correction’s officer’s demand due to severe lower back pain. In the first three placements, she’s spent over 1,5 months in punishment cells, sometimes for longer than 15 days in a row. Several other people who received long sentences under the war censorship laws or in relation to their anti-war positions, such as Aleksei Gorinov and Vladimir Kara-Murza, have also been repeatedly placed in solitary confinement, deprived of adequate healthcare and other basic human rights.

TAKE ACTION

* Write an appeal in your own words or use the **model letter** on **page 2**.
* Please take action before **31 May** 2024.
* Preferred language: **Russian, English**. You can also write in your own language.
* **INFO POSTAGE**: Post delivery is possible to almost all countries. Please check at the Swiss Post whether letters are currently being delivered to the destination country.   
  If not, please send by email, fax or social media and/or via the embassy with the request for forwarding to the named person. Thank you !

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| APPEALS TO | COPIES TO |
| 1) Gerasimov Sergei Yermagenovich Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Altai krai Lenina prospekt, 147-B Barnaul, Altai krai, 656011 Russian Federation  Email: [ufsin.ak@gmail.com](mailto:ufsin.ak@gmail.com)  By sending the letter online via the platform <http://22.fsin.su/reception/> (form is only in Russian, need VPN to access from outside of Russia)  2) Vasilyev Anton Aleksandrovich The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation in the Altai krai Partizanskaya ul, 69 Barnaul, Altai krai, 656059 Russian Federation  Email: [upch@alregn.ru](mailto:upch@alregn.ru) | Botschaft der Russischen Föderation Brunnadernrain 37 3006 Bern  Fax: 031 352 55 95 E-Mail: [rusbotschaft@bluewin.ch](mailto:rusbotschaft@bluewin.ch)  FB: /RusEmbSwiss  Twitter/X: /RusEmbSwiss |
| ⭢ **Social media guidance** and **additional targets** see online: [amnesty.ch](https://www.amnesty.ch) 🔍**UA 033/24** or **EUR 46/7964/2024** | |

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Gerasimov Sergei Yermagenovich  
Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service

of the Altai krai  
Lenina prospekt, 147-B  
Barnaul, Altai krai, 656011  
Russian Federation

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Dear Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Altai Krai,

**I am deeply concerned by the unjust imprisonment and alleged ill-treatment of a RusNews journalist Maria Ponomarenko who is under your control**. Since her arrest in 2022 there have been multiple reports of her ill-treatment and arbitrary punishment in custody in IK-6 (Shipunovo) and SIZO-1 and SIZO-2 in Barnaul, including:

Forced psychiatric treatment, including administration of unknown drugs; Provision of ill-fitting shoes ahead of a disciplinary hearing; Disruptions in provision of medication; Confiscation of authorized goods and groceries by Federal Penitentiary Service staff; Threats by Federal Penitentiary Service staff to deprive Maria of phone calls with her family; Repeated placement in solitary confinement.

Maria suffers from claustrophobia and other mental health conditions and cannot safely be placed in solitary confinement. During her previous placement in a punishment cell her mental health deteriorated, and she attempted suicide. She went on hunger strike after being placed in solitary confinement to protest her undignified treatment by the prison authorities. This ill-treatment by the prison authorities under your control puts Maria Ponomarenko’s health, both physical and mental, as well as her life at risk. It violates her human rights and I’m concerned this is being carried out as a form of reprisal for her expressing her anti-war views.

**I urge you to release Maria Ponomarenko immediately and unconditionally. In the meantime, I request that you use your existing powers to ensure that the ill-treatment of Maria Ponomarenko is immediately stopped and that her treatment in any prison institution, as well as while in transit between them, complies with international law and standards. All those suspected of responsibility for Maria Ponomarenko’s ill-treatment must be brought to justice in fair proceedings in accordance with international law.**

Yours sincerely,

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**Copie**

Botschaft der Russischen Föderation, Brunnadernrain 37, 3006 Bern

Fax: 031 352 55 95 / E-Mail: rusbotschaft@bluewin.ch / FB: /RusEmbSwiss / Twitter/X: /RusEmbSwiss

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Vasilyev Anton Aleksandrovich  
The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation in the Altai krai  
Partizanskaya ul, 69  
Barnaul, Altai krai, 656059  
Russian Federation

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Dear Commissioner for Human Rights in the Altai Krai,

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