



United States Mission to the OSCE

A Call on Russia to Release Oyub Titiev and Respect Human Rights in Chechnya

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 15, 2018

In Copenhagen in 1990, OSCE participating States reaffirmed our commitment to ensure the rights of the individual to know and act upon human rights and fundamental freedoms, and reaffirmed the right of the individual to seek and receive assistance – and to assist others – in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. In the 1994 Budapest Summit Declaration, participating States also emphasized the need for protection of human rights defenders. Human rights defenders are the lifeblood of the Helsinki process and are essential to our collective efforts to implement our international obligations and OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chair, the United States, together with numerous participating States around this table, remains deeply concerned about the ongoing judicial harassment and arbitrary detention of Oyub Titiev, Head of the Human Rights Center "Memorial" office in Chechnya. We are troubled by reports of exculpatory video evidence that may corroborate Mr. Titiev's claim that the drugs planted by the security services had "disappeared." Authorities' refusal to transfer the case to the federal level, where Mr. Titiev would not be investigated by the agencies accused of framing him, is deeply disappointing. On March 6, a District Court in Chechnya extended the detention of Mr. Titiev by two months, until May 9. If convicted on dubious drug possession charges, Mr. Titiev faces a maximum 10-year prison sentence.

Mr. Chair, the United States is disturbed by reliable reports that Mr. Titiev's relatives and lawyers are being harassed and targeted for reprisals, forcing some family members to leave their homes. The Russian Federation should recall that, in 1989, participating States committed to "ensure that no individual ... seeking to exercise ... rights and freedoms, or any member of his family, will as a consequence be discriminated against in any manner." Threats and reprisals against Mr. Titiev's loved ones show an appalling disregard for that commitment.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Titiev's case is emblematic of the abysmal human rights situation in Chechnya, which is stuck in a vicious downward spiral, as local government officials commit abuses with impunity at the direction of Ramzan Kadyrov. It is clear that Mr. Titiev is being prosecuted in order to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, including the Human Rights Center "Memorial" in Chechnya and the North Caucasus.

The United States reiterates its call on Chechen authorities to immediately release Mr. Titiev and allow independent civil society to operate free from harassment and intimidation. We continue to urge Russian Federation authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into an attack earlier this year on Memorial's office in Ingushetia, as well as the

burning of a vehicle belonging to Memorial's office in Dagestan, accompanied by threats against Memorial employees. Those responsible for the attacks and harassment must be held accountable.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.