



United States Mission to the OSCE

Abduction and illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens by the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
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For Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, Oleksander Kolchenko, and other Ukrainian hostages, more than one year has passed in Russian custody. Russia has chosen to ignore its commitments under the Minsk agreements, which calls for the release of all hostages and illegally detained persons. We call on the Russian Federation to honor its international commitments and release, without delay, all hostages and illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

Russia's decision to move the trial of Verkhovna Rada member Nadiya Savchenko from Moscow to Rostov, which has limited access by Moscow-based media outlets and diplomatic missions, did nothing to build confidence in the fairness of these proceedings. This Friday, August 21, the Rostov District Court will consider a motion by Ms. Savchenko's defense team to restore the venue of the trial to Moscow; we will be watching the outcome of this hearing carefully. The fact remains, however, that Ms. Savchenko should not be on trial at all. She is being held in Russia after having been seized in Ukraine by Russian-backed separatists and spirited across the border. We continue to have serious concerns about her treatment in detention.

We are likewise deeply concerned by Oleg Sentsov's testimony during his trial on August 6 detailing the treatment he received in FSB custody, including alleged beatings, strangulation, and suffocation with plastic bags. We also note that allegations have emerged recently that another Ukrainian hostage, Gennadiy Afanasyev, had been tortured and coerced into providing a confession and testimony against Oleg Sentsov and Oleksander Kolchenko. Amnesty International recently reported that after Mr. Afanasyev attempted to retract his coerced testimony against Oleg Sentsov in court on July 31, he may have been further abused in prison.

This morning there were reports that the Russian prosecutor has asked for 23 years for Oleg Sentsov and 10 years for Oleksander Kolchenko. Instead, they should be released immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.