

Civic Solidarity Platform calls for the immediate release of Crimean Tatar leader Ilmi Umerov

2 October 2017

We, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), condemn the politically motivated conviction of prominent Crimean Tatar leader Ilmi Umerov and call for his immediate and unconditional acquittal.

On 27 September 2017, Simferopol District Court in Russia-occupied Crimea found Umerov guilty of separatism and sentenced him to two years in a colony settlement and banned him from engaging in public activities, including any kind of media contact for two years. The court handed down a prison term, despite the fact that the prosecution asked for a suspended sentence. We are convinced that Umerov was convicted and imprisoned for no other reason than for openly criticizing and peacefully opposing the unlawful Russian annexation of Crimea and the persecution of the ethnic Crimean Tatar minority by the Russia-installed authorities on the peninsula.

The harsh sentence imposed on Umerov is a blatant violation of freedom of expression and is clearly aimed at intimidating and silencing other critical voices in Crimea. Many observers have expressed the view that the harshness of the sentence may at least partly be a response to the [report](#) issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 26 September, which concludes that grave human rights violations have been committed in Crimea since it was annexed by Russia. The Russian authorities have denounced this report.

Umerov is deputy head of the Crimean Tatars' representative body Mejlis that was banned as "extremist" by the Russian Supreme Court in 2016, former head of the Crimean Supreme Council and a well-known and authoritative figure in Crimea. He has persistently refused to cooperate with the Russia-controlled authorities following the Russian take-over of Crimea and openly expressed his disapproval of the annexation of the peninsula, for which he has been subjected to pressure. In May 2016 he was charged with separatism on the basis of statements he made on the Crimean Tatar TV channel ART in March 2016, when he said that sanctions against Russia should be stepped up to force it to leave Crimea and Donbas.

Umerov's investigation and trial were undermined by serious procedural violations and his right to defense was infringed when his lawyer Nikolai Polozov was designated as a witness in the case, thereby preventing him from representing Umerov. During the investigation, Umerov was subjected to a humiliating psychiatric examination and forcibly detained in a psychiatric hospital for three weeks. He was banned from leaving Crimea pending the trial. The 60-year-old suffers from several chronic health conditions, including diabetes, Parkinson's disease and heart problems for which he needs ongoing treatment, as a result of which his imprisonment may pose a serious threat to his health.

Ilmi Umerov is not the only Crimean Tatar leader and critic of the Russian occupation of Crimea to have been detained and charged with criminal offenses. Earlier this month, another deputy head of the Mejlis, Akhtem Chiygoz, was given an eight-year prison sentence on charges of organizing mass riots, while Radio Free Europe/

Radio Liberty journalist Mykola Semena similarly was found guilty of separatism, given a 30-month suspended sentence and banned from engaging in public activities for three years. Crimean Tatar activist and human rights defender Emir Huseyn Kuku remains in pre-trial detention on charges of membership of a banned group. According to information from human rights defenders, over 60 people have been prosecuted on politically motivated criminal charges since the Russian take-over of Crimea.

We call for an end to the crackdown on those who speak out against Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, as well as its abusive policies on the peninsula. All those imprisoned for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression on the peninsula should be immediately and unconditionally released.

We also call on representatives of the international community to publicly denounce Umerov's conviction and to press for his acquittal and release, as well as his access to adequate medical treatment.

Signed by the following CSP members:

1. Association UMDPL (Ukraine)
2. Bur Duino (Kyrgyzstan)
3. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
4. Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
5. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia/Poland)
6. Citizens' Watch (Russia)
7. Crimea SOS (Ukraine)
8. Crude Accountability (USA)
9. DRA - German-Russian Exchange (Germany)
10. Fair Trails (UK)
11. Freedom Files (Poland/Russia)
12. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor (Armenia)
13. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
14. Human Rights Center (Azerbaijan)
15. Human Rights Information Center (Ukraine)
16. Humanrights.ch (Switzerland)
17. Institute "Respublica" (Ukraine)
18. Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)
19. International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
20. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)
21. KRF Public Alternative (Ukraine)
22. Legal Policy Research Center (Kazakhstan)
23. Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
24. Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)
25. Promo LEX (Moldova)
26. Protection of Rights without Borders (Armenia)
27. Public Association "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)
28. Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)
29. Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Azerbaijan/Georgia)
30. Solidarus (Germany/Russia)
31. The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (Belarus)
32. The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (Kosovo)
33. The Macedonian Helsinki Committee (Macedonia)
34. The Netherlands Helsinki Committee (The Netherlands)

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