

URGENT ACTION

IMPRISONED JOURNALIST GOES ON HUNGER STRIKE

Stanislav Aseev, a Ukrainian freelance journalist who the pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk have kept in detention on spurious charges since June 2017, has declared a hunger strike. The de facto authorities claim the journalist committed “espionage”- a trumped up accusation, based solely on his legitimate, peaceful work as a journalist.

Freelance journalist, **Stanislav Aseev** has declared a hunger strike – which he is believed to have started at the end of June, demanding better conditions in detention, the provision of adequate medical care, and, ultimately, his release. According to credible sources, Stanislav Aseev is currently being held in an informal detention facility called *Izolyatsiya*, which used to be a factory and then an art space before the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014. The de facto authorities of the self-styled “Donetsk Peoples’ Republic” (“DNR”) have repeatedly denied visits to Stanislav Aseev by the UN Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The UN Mission has confirmed Stanislav Aseev’s location with a former detainee in *Izolyatsiya*, who spoke to the mission after his release. Amnesty International has received information from a confidential source suggesting that in June 2017 Stanislav Aseev was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention. The organisation is not able to confirm this information independently but regards it plausible.

The detention conditions in *Izolyatsiya* do not comply with international standards, according to people who were held in the facility and released during a prisoner exchange between the Ukrainian authorities and the “DNR” in December 2017. The space, amongst other things, does not have a special dedicated medical team to assist detainees and medical help is given only on an ad hoc basis. According to Ehor Firsov, a former Ukrainian MP and friend of Stanislav Aseev, who refers to an anonymous source in Donetsk to protect their identity, Stanislav Aseev is being held in a humid, cold room in the basement of *Izolyatsiya*, and as a result, has developed a bad cough, for which he has not received regular treatment.

Agents of the so-called “Ministry of State Security” (“MGB”) of the “DNR” claim Stanislav Aseev committed espionage, an accusation which appears to be related to Stanislav Aseev’s work as an undercover journalist, reporting on Donetsk. The “investigation” into the espionage allegations are ongoing. There are serious concerns about his health and the arbitrary nature of the proceedings against him.

Please write immediately in Russian, English or your own language calling on the de facto authorities to:

- Immediately release Stanislav Aseev;
- Pending his release, allow him to be visited by the UN Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and ensure that he has regular access to adequate medical care;
- Ensure that Stanislav Aseev and other journalists are able to carry out legitimate journalist activities without interference, including when travelling in and out of the territories affected by the conflict in eastern Ukraine;
- Remind them that under international humanitarian law, which is binding on all parties in conflict, arbitrary, abusive and prolonged detention of civilians is prohibited.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 AUGUST 2018 TO:

Head of the DNR

Aleksandr Zakharchenko

Donetsk, Ukraine

Email: op@dnr-sovet.su

Salutation: Dear Mr. Zakharchenko

Head of MGB

Vladimir Pavlenko

Donetsk, Ukraine

Email: mgbdnr@yandex.ru

Salutation: Dear Mr. Pavlenko

And copies to:

Ombudsperson of the DNR

Darya Morozova

Donetsk, Ukraine

Email: ombudsman_dnr@mail.ru

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HER EXCELLENCY Ms Natalia Galibarenko, Embassy of Ukraine, 60 Holland Park W11 3SJ, 020 7727 6312, Fax 020 7792 1708, emb_gb@mfa.gov.ua, www.ukremb.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 160/17. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR50/6725/2017/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Stanislav Aseev is a freelance journalist in the separatist-controlled Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, who, until his captivity on 2 June 2017, was working under a pseudonym, reporting about daily life in the self-styled “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“DNR”). In July 2017, it was discovered that Stanislav Aseev had been held in incommunicado detention by the pro-Russian separatists since 2 June 2017. Initially, the de facto authorities denied knowledge of his fate and whereabouts.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine began in the first months of 2014, after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation. In April and May 2014, opponents of the new Kyiv government occupied buildings belonging to the local administrations and law enforcement agencies in several towns in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions of eastern Ukraine (Donbass). Demanding increased local autonomy or independence from Ukraine, and closer ties with Russia, protest organizers formed armed groups, backed by the Russian Federation, and proclaimed the creation of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic”. In response, the authorities in Kyiv launched what they characterized as a “counter terrorist operation” (antiteroristichna operatsiya – ATO) aimed at retaking control of the area. In May 2018, the ATO officially came to an end and was replaced with a “joint forces operation” (operatsiya obyednanyh sil – OOS), which gave the Ukrainian army a leading authority in the conflict-affected regions as opposed to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) previously.

In the self-proclaimed “republics”, local security services operate with no checks and balances, detain individuals arbitrarily and hold them in their own detention facilities. Often, detainees are subjected to 30 days of “administrative detention” during which they have no access to the outside world. Amnesty International and other organizations monitoring human rights have also documented cases when such detainees are tortured and otherwise ill-treated in order to extract a forced “confession”, which is then used by a de facto court for conviction. For more details about such practices, please see the joint report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch *You Don’t Exist: Arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture in eastern Ukraine*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/4455/2016/en/>

The “DNR” does not have properly constituted courts which meet international law and standards. Article 321 of its “Criminal Code”, which deals with “espionage”, carries a penalty of up to 20 years in prison or, in war time, death. Under international humanitarian law, the passing of sentences and carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court which complies with international law and standards on fair trial is a war crime.

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 160/17 Index: EUR 50/8754/2018 Issue Date: 6 July 2018