

URGENT ACTION

SHAMAN IN PSYCHIATRIC DETENTION FOR CRITICIZING PUTIN

On 2 June, the Yakutsk City Court approved the indefinite forcible psychiatric hospitalisation of Aleksandr Gabyshev, a shaman who in 2019 announced he would march on foot from Yakutsk, in east Siberia, to Moscow “to purge” President Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin. Aleksandr Gabyshev is being targeted for his open criticism of the authorities and should not be arbitrarily deprived from his freedom or administered any medical treatment without his free and informed consent.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prosecutor of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)
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Dear Prosecutor,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the forcible psychiatric hospitalisation of **Aleksandr Gabyshev**, a Siberian shaman who started a walking journey in 2019 from Yakutsk to Moscow where he promised to “purge” Russian President Vladimir Putin from Kremlin. His journey was unlawfully halted by police in September 2019 and he was forced to return to Yakutsk.

On 12 May 2020, riot police accompanied by several medics forcibly entered his home and took him to the Yakut Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary purportedly because he refused to be tested for COVID-19. According to his lawyer, Aleksandr Gabyshev was forced to sign a consent form to be hospitalised for observation for two weeks. Aleksandr Gabyshev tested negative for COVID-19 and on 29 May, he requested to be released. Instead, a medical commission was promptly formed which concluded that he posed a “danger to himself and to others”. The Director of the Dispensary sought approval from the Yakutsky City Court to extend Aleksandr Gabyshev’s confinement and argued that his patient “suffers from over-valuing of his personality” and that he had expressed ideas intended “to harm the government.” On 2 June, the court approved the forcible hospitalisation of Aleksandr Gabyshev and he may now be confined in the psychiatric hospital indefinitely.

No-one can be deprived of their freedom arbitrarily. According to international law and standards, deprivation of liberty on grounds of mental illness is unjustified if not strictly necessary to protect the safety of the person or of others. In the case of Aleksandr Gabyshev, his political views, in conjunction with his religious beliefs, were held against him as evidence of his purported mental disability. His forcible hospitalisation has been approved despite there being no genuine evidence that he poses any danger to anyone. Moreover, his right to a fair trial was violated when his defence called several witnesses, but they were detained by the police for supposedly violating the restrictive measures introduced to fight COVID-19.

Aleksandr Gabyshev’s forcible hospitalisation at a psychiatric hospital is a case of punitive psychiatry and is an egregious violation of his rights to liberty and to freedom of expression.

In the light of the above, I urge you to take all necessary steps to immediately end Aleksandr Gabyshev’s forcible hospitalization, and his ongoing persecuted for his political beliefs.

Yours sincerely

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Aleksandr Gabyshev is a follower of a traditional local religion in his native Yakutia, and a political activist. After his first attempt to march 8,500 kilometres from Yakutsk to Moscow to “purge” Russian President Vladimir Putin from Kremlin in 2019, Aleksandr Gabyshev has faced multiple instances of harassment and persecution by the authorities. On 19 September 2019, armed and masked law enforcement officials encircled the site near the village of Vydrino, 3,000 kilometres west of Yakutsk, where Aleksandr Gabyshev was camping with his companions. They took away the shaman, without revealing who they were or explaining their actions. He was transferred to Yakutsk and held incommunicado at the Yakut Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary. After he refused to undergo psychiatric examination, he was released but only to be charged with “public calls for extremist activity” (Part 1 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). Aleksandr Gabyshev was then placed under covert police surveillance. Meanwhile, some of his supporters have been repeatedly arrested and fined for allegedly committing minor offenses.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which Russia is a State party, forbids the deprivation of liberty based on the existence of any disability, including mental or intellectual. Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on torture has said that medical treatment administered in the absence of free and informed consent may amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English, Yakut.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 20 July 2020
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Aleksandr Gabyshev (he/his)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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Please also send copies to the regional government at:
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And copies to:

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