

URGENT ACTION

SHAMAN CHALLENGES INDEFINITE HOSPITALIZATION

On 23 September, the Supreme Court of Sakha (Yakutia), in Russia, will consider shaman Aleksandr Gabyshev's appeal against the decision to confine him to psychiatric hospital. Meanwhile he is in pretrial detention and under investigation for alleged violence against a police officer. The shaman has been long targeted by the authorities after he vowed in 2019 to walk from Siberia to Moscow and use his shamanic powers "to purge" President Vladimir Putin. He has been repeatedly arbitrarily arrested, and subjected to humiliating searches and examinations, and confined in a psychiatric institution, all for criticizing the Russian authorities and his peaceful activism.

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

Прокурору Республики Саха (Якутия)

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Dear Prosecutor,

I am urging you to intervene and stop the harassment of Aleksandr Gabyshev, 52 years-old resident of Yakutsk, including his intended confinement in a psychiatric institution under the decision by Yakutsk City Court taken on 26 July 2021. His appeal against it will be heard on 23 September.

That is the second instance of Aleksandr Gabyshev facing punitive psychiatry, after he was arbitrarily placed in a psychiatric institution between 12 May and 22 July 2020 and release in response to a wide public outcry. If he loses his appeal on 23 September he risks being confined there indefinitely and subjected to forcible treatment.

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. 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.

Aleksandr Gabyshev is a shaman who engaged in peaceful activism in 2018, as a public critic of President Vladimir Putin. In the years that followed, he was subjected to repeated arbitrary arrests by police, humiliating examinations and unfounded psychiatric confinement. On 27 January 2021, his home was raided by dozens of police officers, when he was arrested and accused of using violence.

I call on you to take all necessary steps to ensure that Aleksandr Gabyshev is not be subjected to punitive psychiatry, and that his harassment by police in retaliation for his peaceful activism stops. Any allegations against him must be effectively and impartially investigated, and his right to a fair trial must be fully respected.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 23 September 2021, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) will consider the appeal by Aleksandr Gabyshev against an earlier court decision to confine him indefinitely in a psychiatric institution and authorizing his forcible treatment.

Aleksandr Gabyshev is a shaman who is known for his intention, declared 2019, to walk 8,500 kilometres from Yakutsk to Moscow and use his shamanic powers “to purge” President Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin. Weeks later and after walking hundreds of kilometres, Aleksandr Gabyshev was arbitrarily arrested by police in September 2019 and placed in a psychiatric institution but soon released and placed under surveillance, and named a suspect under Article 280(1) of the Criminal Code (“public calls for extremist activities”). He tried to walk to Moscow once again, and was again arbitrarily arrested in May 2020, allegedly for refusing to be tested for Covid-19. He was examined by psychiatrists and found to be “suffering from over-valuing of his own personality” in connection with his declared intention “to harm the government.” He was released on 22 July 2020, following public outcry in Russia and internationally.

On 27 January 2021, days after Aleksandr Gabyshev had announced preparations for another march to Moscow, his home was raided by some 50 law enforcement officers reportedly lead by the Deputy Interior Minister of Yakutia. The pretext for the raid was Aleksandr Gabyshev’s non-attendance of a psychiatrist in connection with his purported mental health condition. Police claim that during his apprehension, Aleksandr Gabyshev drew a ceremonial Yakut sword and caused an injury (small cut) to one of the officers. On 2 February, Yakutsk City Court ruled to confine him to a psychiatric institution for medical examination, and three weeks later, the Investigative Committee announced that he was officially charged with making “calls for extremism” and “using violence against police officers”. On 18 March, medical experts announced that he was diagnosed with a mental health issue which required hospitalization and treatment. On 26 July, Yakutsk City Court ruled to confine Aleksandr Gabyshev to the Yakut Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary for an indefinite period while he was being investigated under the above-mentioned allegations.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 November 2021

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)