

URGENT ACTION

JAILED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE

On 31 March, the Kirsanovskiy District Court adjourned Yevgeniy Vitishko's parole hearing until 15 April. On 6 April the activist was informed that the Russian Supreme Court had rejected his appeal against his custodial sentence. The next day he started a hunger strike in protest.

At the parole hearing on 31 March, the penal colony representative said that the colony did not support **Yevgeniy Vitishko's** parole application on the grounds that the activist "had committed eight violations and received seven reprimands". According to the representative, Yevgeniy Vitishko's "violations" included giving one of his personal clothing items to another prisoner who did not have warm clothes and was cold; sitting on his bed at an unauthorized time; sleeping in an isolation cell at an unauthorized time; storing food in an unauthorized place; receiving correspondence from his lawyer without notification of the penal colony administration; and "negligent attitude towards weeding tomatoes". Having questioned some experts and studied Yevgeniy Vitishko's "character references", the defense and prosecution asked the judge to call some penal colony staff members, including those monitoring the tomato weeding, to give testimonies regarding the reprimands imposed on the activist. The parole hearing has been adjourned until 15 April.

According to Yevgeniy Vitishko's lawyer and supporters, on 7 April, after having learnt that his appeal against the decision to send him to jail had been rejected by the Russian Supreme Court, he started a hunger strike. Now that the Supreme Court refused to consider Yevgeniy Vitishko's appeal, parole remains virtually his only hope for release.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Yevgeniy Vitishko as he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Expressing concern that Yevgeniy Vitishko has been subjected to harassment by the penitentiary administration;
- Calling on the penal colony authorities to provide Yevgeniy Vitishko with any medical attention he might require while he is on hunger strike.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 MAY 2015 TO:

Prosecutor of Tambov Region

Vladimir Ivanovich Torgovchenkov
Prosecutor's Office of Tambov Region
ul. Lermontovskaya, 1
392000 Tambov, Russian Federation
Fax: 011 7 4752 72 54 01
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Director of the Federal Service of Execution of Punishments

Gennadii Aleksandrovich Kornienko
ul. Zhitnaya 14, GSP-1
119991 Moscow, Russian Federation
Fax: 011 7 4959 82 19 50 /
011 7 495 982 19 30
Email: udmail@fsin.su
Salutation: Dear Director

And copies to:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation
Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: 011 7 495 987 5841; 011 7 495 692 1725

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak, Embassy of the Russian Federation
2650 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington DC 20007
Phone: 1 202 298 5700 | Fax: 1 202 298 5735 | Email: embassy@russianembassy.org

Please let us know if you took action so that we can track our impact! EITHER send a short email to uan@aiusa.org with "UA 14/14" in the subject line, and include in the body of the email the number of letters and/or emails you sent, OR fill out this [short online form](#) (press Ctrl + click on link) to let us know how you took action. Thank you for taking action! Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fourth update of UA 14/14. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR46/1302/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yevgeniy Vitishko is a prominent member of the environmental organization Environmental Watch for the North Caucasus (Ecologicheskaya Vakhta po Severnomu Kavkazu). He and his fellow activists have been actively involved in protests regarding the deforestation, construction and illegal fencing in protected areas in Krasnodar Region.

In June 2012, a court in Tuapse conditionally sentenced him to three years in a prison colony, with a two-year probation period, for allegedly damaging in November 2011 a fence erected illegally in a protected forest in Krasnodar region. Yevgeniy Vitishko and other local environmental activists asserted that the fencing was illegal, and that rare protected trees were being cut down behind it, and their intentions were to document these violations. For months, the activists were urging local and federal-level government agencies to address this ongoing violation, but no action was taken by the authorities. The activists then took down two sections of the fence to photograph the violations, and sprayed graffiti on the fence.

Yevgeniy Vitishko and his co-defendant Suren Gazaryan, who has since left the country and received asylum abroad on the basis that he was being targeted for his environmental activism, did not receive a fair trial. There were a number of substantial concerns about the merits of the case and procedural violations. Some of these concerns were expressly noted by the Russian Supreme Court which ruled, in October 2013, that the lower instance court should have considered the issue of legality of construction of the fence and the identity of the fence's legal owner, on which the defense had been insisting. Despite the ruling of the Supreme Court, a lower court took a view that there were no grounds for reviewing Yevgeniy Vitishko's case.

In the run-up to the Sochi Winter Olympics, Yevgeniy Vitishko, as well as other members of his organization, were continuously subjected to a harassment campaign by the Russian authorities, including repeated arrests and brief detentions, personal searches, questioning of activists themselves and of their close relatives by police, and unofficial warnings from police and security officials to abstain from protesting during the Sochi Olympics.

On 20 December 2013, Yevgeniy Vitishko was brought to court in relation to allegations that he had travelled outside his hometown without permission and thereby had broken the conditions of the curfew (travel restrictions) associated with his conditional sentence. The judge ruled that for this he should serve the original three-year sentence in a prison colony.

On 3 February 2014 the police arrested Yevgeniy Vitishko as he was leaving the Probation offices in Tuapse, where he was to report on a regular basis as one of the requirements of his conditional sentence, and told he was suspected of a theft. He was taken to court the same day and was found guilty of "petty hooliganism" on trumped-up charges of having used foul language at a bus stop earlier the same morning. He was sentenced to 15 days in detention. It was only after Yevgeniy Vitishko began serving this sentence that his lawyer was able to see him.

On 12 February 2014, Krasnodar Regional Court rejected Yevgeniy Vitishko's appeal against the court decision of 20 December 2013 and confirmed that Yevgeniy Vitishko should serve his original sentence in jail. His sentence started on 18 February 2014 and on 24 February 2014 Yevgeniy Vitishko was sent to a penal colony in Tambov Region.

According to the Russian Criminal Code, conditions for parole include the "convict's behavior, attitude to study and work when serving his sentence, including commendations and reprimands which the convict received ... as well as a submission of the penal institution's administration regarding whether it is worthwhile to release the prisoner on parole."

Name: Yevgeniy Vitishko (m)

Issues: Prisoner of conscience, Health concern, Hunger strike

Further information on UA: 14/14 (22 January 2014) and updates (3 February 2014, 18 February 2014, 25 March 2015)

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