

Russia: Navalny is prisoner of conscience after 'politically-motivated' sentencing



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, with Amnesty staff member among those swept up

‘This latest crackdown stands out for its viciousness and sheer scale’ - Natalia Zviagina

Responding to a court in Moscow sentencing the opposition activist and Kremlin critic Aleksei Navalny to two years and eight months in prison this afternoon - the latest development in a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests in Russia - Natalia Zviagina, Amnesty International’s Moscow Office Director, said:

“In their vendetta against Aleksei Navalny and his supporters, the Russian authorities have shredded any remaining veneer of justice and respect for human rights. “The politically-motivated sentencing of Aleksei Navalny shows the true face of the Russian authorities, who seem intent on locking up anyone who dares to speak out against their abuses and repression of human rights. “Even after years of documenting human rights violations and abuses by the Russian authorities, this latest crackdown stands out for its viciousness and sheer scale. “There are now more detainees in Russia than there are prison cells, which means people who have done nothing more than attend peaceful demonstrations are being held incommunicado on overcrowded police buses with inadequate sanitation, and in the face of the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Simonovsky District Court, conducting its session in the Moscow City Court premises, granted the motion of the

Federal Penitentiary Service and replaced Navalny's suspended sentence with two-and-a-half years of imprisonment. The activist will be held at a penal colony.

After Aleksei Navalny's arrest on arrival in Moscow from Berlin on 17 January, there have been large-scale protests in numerous Russian cities - protests which have been met by police violence and mass arrests. According to the human rights group OVD-Info, at least 5,021 people were detained throughout the country on Sunday (31 January), including more than 1,600 in Moscow and more than 1,100 in St Petersburg. Many of the more than 3,000 people detained during the dispersal of previous protests on 23 January were sentenced to "administrative arrest," and the capacity of detention facilities across Russia - and especially in Moscow - has now been exceeded.

Among the thousands of peaceful protesters detained on Sunday was an Amnesty staff member who had attended a demonstration in their private capacity. After being arrested for "obstructing road traffic", the Amnesty employee was held overnight at a police station. They were unable to inform family members of their whereabouts for three hours. After managing to make a brief call to their next of kin, their phone was confiscated.

The Amnesty staff member had no access to a lawyer during their detention at the police station. At a sham "trial" the next day, the judge refused to watch the video of the supposed offence and to question police officers or witnesses of the alleged misdemeanour. The individual was sentenced to ten days of "administrative arrest". Like many other detainees, they then spent a night on a police bus before being transported this morning to a deportation centre in Sakharovo (more than 40 miles from Moscow city centre) which is being used to detain protesters in the absence of prison space. Detainees inside the bus did not have access to adequate food, water or sanitation.

"Even the head of the police station where our colleague was initially held could not tell us where they had been transferred. "With so many protesters detained in unknown

locations, we are looking at the prospect of mass enforced disappearance. “Amnesty International considers that the conditions of detention of those deprived of liberty during the overwhelmingly peaceful protests on 31 January amount to torture and other ill-treatment. “We call on the international community, including UN special procedures, and national governments to respond immediately to these mass human rights violations and to hold the authorities to account. “Aleksei Navalny, his associates, and all peaceful protesters arrested ahead, during and following the rallies on 23 and 31 January, as well as today, are prisoners of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released.”

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