

Free Alexei Gaskarov and the Prisoners of May 6!

International Solidarity Action Week, June 17-23, 2013

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Alexei Gaskarov, a Russian social activist and economist, was arrested in Moscow on April 27, 2013. Gaskarov first became known to the broader public both in Russia and abroad in 2010, as one of the “Khimki hostages,” when he was arrested the day after a grassroots protest action in the Moscow suburb of Khimki, apparently because of his role as a spokesman for the anti-fascist and environmental movements. After three months in a pretrial detention facility and a triumphant acquittal on all charges, Gaskarov did not give up his activism. On the contrary, he became even more involved in numerous campaigns and causes. Having gained fame as an anti-fascist, Gaskarov has over the past two years become a visible young public politician thanks to his energy, intelligence, passion, and commitment.

Gaskarov has invested a great deal of time and energy in seeing that his hometown of Zhukovsky, in the Moscow Region, develops in a way that is responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens. To this end, he has continued the work he began during the campaigns to defend the Khimki and Tsagovsky forests by fostering grassroots civic groups and an independent discussion club. In March 2013, Gaskarov was elected to the alternative People’s Council of Zhukovsky, thus receiving recognition from other residents of the town for his efforts.

Gaskarov has constantly sought out other forums for articulating his position. He has worked as a journalist and analyst with the Institute for Collective Action, acted as a spokesperson for the anti-fascist movement, joined the self-governing Autonomous Action network, and been involved in coordinating the environmental movement. Since December 2011, he has been actively engaged in the anti-Putin protest moment, appearing regularly in the media and at rallies and public discussions. In October 2012, he was elected to the Coordinating Council of the Russian opposition, where he has consistently pursued a grassroots social movement agenda.

Center “E,” the notorious “anti-extremist” division of the Russian police created under President Medvedev, cannot forgive Gaskarov for his pivotal role in social movements. After Gaskarov was acquitted of all charges in the Khimki case, the police have subjected him to constant pressure, including several attempted provocations. This time round, police have charged Gaskarov with involvement in “rioting” on May 6, 2012, at a permitted opposition march and rally on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow the day before Putin’s inauguration. Apparently, the police are hoping this high-profile case will end in a long prison sentence for Gaskarov.

Why have Alexei Gaskarov and dozens of other innocent people been arrested?

On May 6, 2012, special riot police and other police officers used violence against demonstrators in Moscow in a deliberate attempt to provoke them, thus clearly violating the freedom of public assembly. An April 22, 2013, public hearing on this incident established the police’s culpability and numerous violations of the law they committed on May 6 on the basis of over six hundred independent eyewitness testimonies and analysis of a large number of photos and videos.

The Russian authorities, however, continue to refuse to open an investigation into the actions of the police. On the contrary, the Russian Federal Investigative Committee has increasingly been used as a tool to intimidate people involved in the grassroots protest movement. The regime's fabricated case against protesters and bystanders was launched on May 27, 2012, when the first suspect, eighteen-year-old Alexandra Dukhanina, was arrested. Since then, police have arrested another twenty-seven people in the case, seemingly without rhyme or reason. The arrestees include students, businesspeople, scientists, activists, pensioners, and ordinary citizens.

Alexei Gaskarov is the latest person to be arrested in the case. On May 6, 2012, he was at the Bolotnaya Square rally, where he was injured: a policeman threw him to the ground and then kicked him in the face. Gaskarov was forced to seek medical attention (he was given several stitches), after which he filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office. But as with other instances of police violence on May 6, 2012, the authorities have not followed up on Gaskarov's complaint.

Nearly a year after the so-called investigation of the May 6 "riots" was launched, a pattern has emerged in the way police, prosecutors, and the courts are railroading the arrestees in the Bolotnaya Square case. All the accused are immediately placed in police custody for two months, after which the courts prolong this pretrial detention several times. The presiding judges make these rulings without taking the arguments of defense lawyers into account and ignoring the obviously falsified evidence presented by prosecutors and investigators. Several of the detainees have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were not in Moscow on May 6, 2012. Despite this, they were also remanded to police custody.

There is a little doubt that the authorities will use this same set of tactics in Alexei Gaskarov's case unless we take decisive action to show our solidarity with him. At least several dozen other people who were at the rally on May 6, 2012, are likewise threatened with imminent arrest and prosecution. On its web site, the Investigative Committee has announced it will continue to work to "identify any and all persons involved in the riots." But it is in our power to stop this political crackdown.

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International solidarity has repeatedly proven to be effective even in the most difficult cases. Thanks to your support the "Khimki hostages" were released in October 2010. This was a genuine victory for the international solidarity campaign. Since that time, a number of other Russian grassroots activists have been persecuted, leading in some cases to countermeasures on the part of organizations and governments. For example, Russian officials guilty of massive corruption and other criminal acts have been banned from entering certain countries. Your support is now especially vital for the dozens of people who have been thrown in jail by the Investigative Committee or whom it intends to arrest on trumped-up charges. Your vocal and visible involvement is essential, because it shows the Russian police and authorities their crimes will not go unnoticed.

June 18 is Alexei Gaskarov's birthday. An illegitimate, lawless court has ruled that he will spend the day in jail. We must act to secure his release and that of the dozens of other innocent prisoners in this fabricated case. The advocacy group gaskarov.info has declared the week of June 17-23 an international solidarity action week. Join us and together we will oppose lawlessness and political persecution in Russia.

How can you help?

1. Use whatever means you have at your disposal to spread this call for solidarity and information about the case of Gaskarov and the other May 6 prisoners. Demand their immediate release. Raise your voice against political arrests and oppressive police tactics in Russia.

2. Sign the online petition that will be sent to the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor's Office:

<https://www.change.org/petitions/free-alexei-gaskarov-and-political-prisoners-in-russia>

3. Carry out your own solidarity actions. You can hold pickets and protest demonstrations at the Russian embassies and consulates in your city. You can check the cultural events calendar where you live for events involving Russia and hold protest actions at these events. You can hold rallies, happenings, art actions, and solidarity sit-ins. You can appeal to the authorities in your country and to international authorities, asking them to intervene on behalf of Alexei Gaskarov and the other prisoners of May 6.

Tell us about your solidarity actions and events by sending descriptions, photos, and videos to this address: gaskarov.info@gmail.com.

4. Write letters to the Russian authorities in support of Alexei Gaskarov and the other May 6 prisoners, demanding their immediate release, the dismissal of all charges against them, and a thorough investigation of the actions of the police against peaceful demonstrators on May 6, 2012, in Moscow.

Send your letters to the following addresses:

- Moscow City Prosecutor's Office

ul. Novokuznetskaya, 27

115184 Moscow

Russian Federation

Online message center

Fax: +7 (495) 951-5040

- Central Investigation Department of the Russian Federal Investigative Committee for Moscow

ul. Arbat, 16/2, str. 1

19002 Moscow

Russian Federation

Online message center

Fax (after 16:00 CET): +7 (495) 691-6315

- Russian Federal Investigative Committee

Tekhnicheskyy pereulok, 2

105005 Moscow

Russian Federation

Online message center

Fax: +7 (499) 265-9077

Telephone: +7 (495) 986-7710

- Russian Federal Prosecutor General's Office

ul. Bolshaya Dmitrovka, 15a

GSP-3 125993 Moscow

Russian Federation

Fax: +7 (495) 692-1725

- Russian Federal Human Rights Ombudsman

ul. Myasnitskaya, 47

101000 Moscow

Russian Federation

Facebook Wall

Please send a copy of your letters to our address: [gaskarov.info gmail.com](mailto:gaskarov.info@gmail.com).

5. Send messages of support to Alexei Gaskarov at [gaskarov.info gmail.com](mailto:gaskarov.info@gmail.com). We'll translate them into Russian, pass them on to Alexei, and also publish them on our website, gaskarov.info.

6. You can financially support our public campaign on behalf of Alexei Gaskarov and the other May 6 prisoners and contribute to their legal defense fund. Send your donations to a PayPal account [dmitry.cw gmail.com](mailto:dmitry.cw@gmail.com).

7. If you're an artist, make a graphic work in solidarity with Alexei Gaskarov and send it to [gaskarov.info gmail.com](mailto:gaskarov.info@gmail.com): it will be published on our web site gaskarov.info. The most eye-catching works will be printed on stickers and pasted up all over Moscow (with you credited as the contributing artist). If you're a journalist or writer, send us articles and blog posts you've written and published about Alexei Gaskarov and the political crackdown in Russia. If you do other work that can help inform people about Alexei Gaskarov, write to us at [gaskarov.info gmail.com](mailto:gaskarov.info@gmail.com).

Thank you for your solidarity! Watch for campaign news and updates (in Russian and several other languages) on our webs site, gaskarov.info.
