



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Death of Aleksey Navalny and the Dire Human Rights Situation in Russia

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 29, 2024

Aleksey Navalny's death in a remote Arctic penal colony on February 16 was the long-feared but tragically expected conclusion to a career dedicated to challenging the Kremlin's abuses of power. Alongside his family and supporters, we mourn his loss and honor his remarkable legacy. We know perfectly well that Putin's Russia allows absolutely no room for real political opposition, for freedom of expression, for any opinions contrary to those carefully cultivated and approved by the government. Navalny knew this too but refused to accept it as a fait accompli for his country. He spent many years fighting against rampant corruption, participating in peaceful street protests, and exposing the extravagant lives of Russia's ruling elite as they ignored the needs of the average citizen.

Aleksey Navalny never stopped fighting for a better future for his country, even when the Kremlin's efforts to halt his activities and curb his popularity culminated in an attempt on his life in August 2020. Navalny believed passionately in Russia's potential and in the power of its people to hold their government accountable. Although he knew the odds were high that arrest and imprisonment awaited him, Navalny returned to Russia in January 2021. In explaining this decision three years later, he wrote on social media, "I don't want to give up either my country or my beliefs. I cannot betray either the first or the second. If your beliefs are worth something, you must be willing to stand up for them. And if necessary, make some sacrifices."

Navalny stood up for both his beliefs and his country, and in doing so, he sacrificed everything. There is no doubt that responsibility for his death lies with the Kremlin, and with the man so afraid of him that he has refused to even utter Navalny's name in public. Strong and confident leaders accept challenges from political opponents. They attain and exercise political power through free and fair elections and govern by the rule of law. On the other hand, weak and insecure leaders wield the law as a political weapon and eliminate opponents so that they never have to answer to the people or the law.

Navalny might be gone, but as civil society organizations report, more than 680 political prisoners remain in Russia, many in real danger of falling victim to a fate similar to Navalny's. Among them is pro-democracy advocate and opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza, sentenced in April 2023 to 25 years in prison for speaking out against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Like Navalny, he has survived poisonings that nearly killed him, and his health continues to deteriorate in jail. Russian authorities should release Kara-Murza immediately, ensure he receives all necessary medical attention, and drop the unjust and politically motivated charges against him. Additionally, Russian authorities should

unconditionally release all those unjustly detained in the country, including human rights activists, opposition figures, journalists, and others. We are especially concerned about the health of Moscow municipal deputy Aleksey Gorinov, activist Igor Baryshnikov, and historian Yury Dmitriev – all of whom need urgent medical care.

Far too many Russian citizens have lost their livelihoods or even their lives for defending human rights, speaking the truth about current and historical events, or showing sympathy to those facing the Kremlin's brutal repression. We stand in solidarity with Oleg Orlov, the 70-year-old leader of the human rights group Memorial, who on Tuesday, February 27, was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for criticizing the Kremlin's war. He should be released. This week, we also remember former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, assassinated on February 27, 2015, for his work promoting democracy and political reform.

The United States is committed to holding Russia to account for its human rights abuses and violations at home and abroad. In 2022, we joined 37 other participating States in invoking the Moscow Mechanism to investigate the Russian Federation's failure to uphold its OSCE human dimension commitments. The resulting report confirmed severe limitations on human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia, as well as documented reports of widespread torture and ill-treatment in places of detention. To impose additional costs for Russia's repression, human rights abuses, and aggression against Ukraine, on February 23, the U.S. State Department and U.S. Department of Treasury announced new sanctions targeting more than 500 companies and individuals—including three prison officials in relation to Navalny's death. This brings to over 4,000 the number of entities and individuals the United States has sanctioned since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

As we continue to mourn Aleksey Navalny, Boris Nemtsov, and the others who have paid for their principles with their lives, we stand in solidarity with those they inspired not just in Russia but around the world. Let us all fight for the values and principles we hold dear, against corruption and authoritarianism, and for a better future for all of our people.

###