

Information on protests in memory of Alexei Navalny

provided by OVD-Info

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OVD-Info is an independent human rights project aimed at monitoring cases of political persecution in Russia and providing legal assistance to victims of such persecution. OVD-Info was founded during mass protests of December 2011 as a volunteer project with the purpose of giving publicity to information on arrests of protesters. Today, OVD-Info operates a 24-hour federal hotline to collect information on all types of political persecution and coordinate legal assistance to its victims, provides legal education to activists and researches different types of political persecution in Russia.

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I. Introduction

Alexei Navalny was a political prisoner, prominent opposition leader and anti-corruption activist, whom Russian authorities had persecuted for years for his work and activism.

Following an assassination attempt in 2020, and undergoing treatment in Germany, Navalny returned to Russia on 17 January 2021, and was arrested and detained upon arrival (AL RUS 4/2021). Countrywide protests calling for his release erupted across Russia, which authorities brutally suppressed, arresting over 17 thousand people in just three days of mass protests (AL RUS 2/2021).

In 2021, the Moscow city court declared his organizations “extremist”. Authorities prosecuted his allies, lawyers, and supporters, including on criminal “extremism” charges. In August 2023, Moscow city court convicted Navalny, who was already serving his sentence following bogus convictions, to 19 years in a maximum security prison under a variety of trumped-up charges, including “extremism” (AL RUS 21/2023).

In December 2023, Navalny was transferred to the IK-3 penal colony “Polar Wolf” in Kharp in the Yamal-Nenets region, the Arctic prison known as one of the harshest in Russia. Prison authorities sent Navalny to a punishment cell 27 times, totaling 308 days, according to his press secretary, the latest for 15 days on 14 February 2024. In detention, he faced multiple health issues, which the authorities failed to treat properly (UA RUS 5/2023). In 2021, he went on a hunger strike demanding medical treatment.

On 16 February 2024, the Federal Penitentiary Service announced his death in a [press release](#). According to the statement, Navalny lost consciousness after a prison walk. Prison medics and civilian paramedics could not resuscitate him, and pronounced Alexei Navalny dead.

People all over Russia and other countries joined in spontaneous displays of solidarity, including rallies and vigils, laying flowers, and posting messages online.

II. Protests in the memory of Alexei Navalny

On 16 February 2024, in different cities of Russia, people spontaneously began [to lay flowers](#) at the monuments of victims of political repression in memory of the death of Alexei Navalny. OVD-Info documented at least 103 arrests on that day. On 17 February 2024, people continued to lay flowers and [held](#) solo demonstrations and rallies. OVD-Info documented at least 252 more arrests, bringing the total number of arrests to at least 355. During these two days, arrests took place in at least 37 Russian cities. Police arrested at least five children.

Under the Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO), law enforcement [charged](#) protesters with violating assembly rules (art. 20.2), [simultaneous mass gathering](#) in public places (art. 20.2.2), [discrediting the armed forces](#) (art. 20.3.3), hooliganism (art. 20.1), [disobeying police orders](#) (art. 19.3) and [Covid-19 restrictions \(art. 8.6.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of St. Petersburg\)](#).

As a result, those arrested received fines, up to 15 days of detention or compulsory work orders. As of 17 February, courts sentenced at least 48 people to detention. More than 34 protesters in [Moscow](#), [St. Petersburg](#), [Taganrog](#), and [Samara](#) were kept overnight in police stations. At least 109 of those arrested were released without prosecution.

In St. Petersburg, a bishop who planned to conduct a memorial service for Alexei Navalny was arrested and [charged](#) with organizing a [simultaneous mass gathering](#) (art. 20.2.2). While in detention, he suffered a [stroke](#) and was hospitalized.

Several dozen arrested protesters spent more than [three hours](#) in a bus because it broke down.

In [St. Petersburg](#), several lawyers were denied access to police stations to provide legal assistance to detained protesters. In one of the Moscow police departments, police initiated the [“Fortress”](#) lockdown contingency plan.

In Moscow, St. Petersburg and Taganrog, police used excessive force against protesters. In St. [Petersburg](#), police beat a man during his arrest, while another detainee was [threatened](#) with violence for refusing to be photographed and to undergo fingerprinting. Detainees were also [threatened](#) with violence if they used their phones. One detainee was [threatened](#) with 15 days of detention for using Article 51 of the Constitution on the right not to testify against oneself. In Taganrog, police [threatened](#) two detainees with beating and detention for a day. The police

also forced them to unlock their phones to read its contents. The police took their explanations and fingerprints, photographed them, and warned them of prosecution on second arrest. In Sochi, police also photographed and fingerprinted the detainee.

In several cities, the police were recording the personal data of people who came to the peaceful commemoration of Alexei Navalny. Some of those present were given warnings and forced to write explanations.

Moreover, the authorities used various means to prevent people from participating in these events. For example, after the start of the peaceful commemoration, on 16 February 2024, the Moscow prosecutor's office issued a warning, indicating that participation in an "unauthorized" public event entails administrative liability. On 17 February 2024, the police, under the pretext of a bomb threat, dispersed Yekaterinburg residents who came to the "Masks of Sorrow" monument to lay flowers in memory of Alexei Navalny. On the same day, in Vladivostok and Moscow, police also called and came to the homes of activists and students to warn them about the liability for their participation in the event in memory of Alexei Navalny.

In addition, the police allowed plain-clothed people to destroy memorials in different cities; in several cities the police destroyed the memorials themselves.

Police detained RusNews and Novaya Gazeta journalists, who filmed the peaceful commemoration and destruction of the memorials to Alexei Navalny in Chelyabinsk and St. Petersburg.

III. Violations of protesters' human rights

Russian authorities violated protesters' rights to peaceful assembly (Article 21 of the ICCPR), freedom of expression (Article 19 of the ICCPR), and liberty and security (Article 9 of the ICCPR). The violent dispersal of spontaneous assemblies, arrests and detentions of protesters had no legitimate aim and were not necessary. These events were peaceful and intended to express sorrow over the death of Alexei Navalny or outrage at the actions of the authorities towards him. The fact that some detainees were eventually released from police stations without charges, as well as the use of various administrative articles covering up an illegal prosecution of protesters for the exercise of their rights and freedoms, proves that the actions of police officers were not based on the rule of law, were arbitrary, and their only purpose was to disperse peaceful spontaneous assemblies.

Police arrested at least five children, which also violates Articles 13, 15 and 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Additionally, a large number of people have been unable to exercise their rights of peaceful assembly and expression due to preventive actions by the police, such as warnings, and restricted access to monuments, as well as due to allowing the destruction of monuments by

non-state actors. These actions undoubtedly have a chilling effect on other people, especially those who wanted to react to the death of Alexei Navalny.

In some cases, police officers used unjustified force, threats and intimidation against detainees, which violates the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment enshrined by Articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR. Other violations of the rights of some detainees were photographing and fingerprinting and personal data collection. These actions were also not lawful and necessary, as the identity of the detainees could be ascertained by other means without interference, and therefore violate the right to privacy prescribed by Article 17 of the ICCPR. Presumably, the police officers collected this data to use a facial recognition system against those people detained in the future.

Cases of detainees' defense lawyers not being allowed to visit them at police stations constitute a violation of the right to legal assistance (Article 14(3)(d) of the ICCPR). In Moscow, police officers referred to the "Fortress" lockdown plan as a pretext, but gave no reasons for such an access restriction.

Lastly, the authorities violated the right to freedom of expression by detaining journalists of "RusNews" and "Novaya Gazeta" media outlets at assemblies. The journalists had provided the documents proving their status but were detained anyway. Such measures were not necessary and constitute violations of Article 19(2) of the ICCPR.

IV. Additional information

Over the years, Russia systematically violated the right of peaceful assembly. OVD-Info recorded at least 61,506 [arrests](#) in connection with assemblies in 2012–2023. Since 2011, authorities [brought](#) at least 77,646 charges under the "assembly rules violations" provisions alone against protesters and bystanders. In addition, Russian authorities continue to persecute political prisoners even after their detention.

Russia failed to amend its legislation on assemblies to accommodate spontaneous gatherings, despite the indication by the Human Rights Committee in the Views adopted on Communication Popova v. Russia (CCPR/C/122/D/2217/2012, para. 9). It similarly failed to comply with the Human Rights Committee recommendations on assembly and expression outlined in its Concluding Observations (CCPR/C/RUS/CO/8, paras. 29, 33), eradicating ill-treatment in detention (para. 21), stopping harassment, violence and killing of opposition politicians, including Alexei Navalny (para. 26). Authorities refused to implement the Opinion of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention calling to release another political prisoner, Alexei Gorinov (A/HRC/WGAD/2022/78).

We are calling on the international community to reinforce its efforts to ensure Russia complies with its international human rights obligations.

Established law enforcement and judicial practice show that violations of the rights of participants of public events in memory of Alexei Navalny will not be remedied at the domestic level, and people seeking justice for violations of their assembly and expression rights can rely only on international mechanisms, primarily, the UN Human Rights Committee and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Between 2017 and 2024, OVD-Info in partnership with the Human Rights Centre “Memorial” (liquidated by authorities) submitted 3,039 complaints of protesters to the European Court of Human Rights, which indicates the scale of the backlog UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies may face following Russia’s expulsion from the Council of Europe.

In order not to deprive people prosecuted for peaceful expression of solidarity with Alexei Navalny, and not to deprive political prisoners and others, whose rights are violated, of any hopes of finding justice, we are calling on the international community to increase the resources of the OHCHR Petitions Unit.

We are also calling on the international community to stand up strongly to Russia’s failure to comply with its human rights obligations, in particular in its treatment of Alexei Navalny, political prisoners and peaceful protesters. Resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council or the UN General Assembly denouncing Russia’s crackdown would send a strong message and increase the chances that the participants of the events of 16 and 17 February along with hundreds of political prisoners will be able to achieve justice.

We would be glad to provide any further information and to share our expertise on this matter.