Memorial recognizes video-blogger Sokolovsky as a political prisoner

Ruslan Sokolovsky, a blogger from Ekaterinburg, has been charged under Article 282, Section 1, of the Russian Criminal Code (inciting hatred or enmity, or insulting human dignity, on the basis of attitudes towards religious belief) and Article 148, Section 2, of the Russian Criminal Code (public actions expressing a clear lack of respect for society and committed with the aim of insulting religious feelings of believers in places specially reserved for the conduct of worship) for playing Pokemon Go on his smartphone in the Cathedral-on-the-Blood in Ekaterinburg, and the subsequent preparation and publication of videos containing sharp criticisms of religion and the Russian Orthodox Church. On 2 September 2016 Sokolovsky was detained, and the following day he was remanded in custody. He was transferred to house arrest on 8 September 2016. On 28 October 2016 on unsubstantiated grounds Sokolovsky was again remanded in custody and sent to a pre-trial detention centre.

Memorial Human Rights Centre concurs with the assessment of experts from the Sova Centre for Information and Analysis who consider that the actions of Sokolovsky do not fall under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code: while the videos he published do contain profanities directed at Christians and Muslims, they do not, however, contain dangerous incitement of any kind.

Such public expressions, doubtless, deserve condemnation. However, along with the Sova Centre we consider that the words ‘debasing dignity’ must be removed from Article 282 of the Criminal Code. Such actions must be the subject exclusively of liability under administrative law, since they do not represent a serious danger to society.

The application of Article 148, Section 2, of the Criminal Code is also inappropriate: not one of the visitors to the cathedral suffered as a result of the actions of the blogger, and no damage was done to Church property.

On the whole, we consider that the existence of criminal liability, in particular where this involves deprivation of liberty, in connection with such vaguely-worded evaluative definitions of a crime as ‘public actions expressing a clear disrespect to society and committed with the aim of insulting the religious feelings of believers,’ is unacceptable in a democratic society.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers Ruslan Sokolovsky a political prisoner and demands his immediate release.

Recognition of an individual as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not mean that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves of the individual’s views, statements or actions.

For more information about the case, see here.

PayPal – an e-wallet for giving help to all Russian political prisoners helppoliticalprisoners@gmail.com

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