

Memorial recognizes historian Yury Dmitriev as a political prisoner

The trial of Yury Dmitriev, head of the Karelian branch of the Memorial Society, is currently taking place in Petrozavodsk. He is charged under Article 242.2 of the Russian Federation Criminal Code (“Use of a minor for the purposes of preparing pornography”) and Article 135 (“Perverted acts without the use of force against a minor”). The charges relate to photographs Dmitriev took of his adopted daughter, in a naked state, between the ages of three and seven. Dmitriev, a 61-year-old pensioner, has been held in a pre-trial detention centre for more than seven months. He denies the charges.

The charges have no basis in law and contradict the factual circumstances of the case. Photographs may be recognised as pornographic only if they have been created for sexual purposes. Dmitriev himself says he took the photographs to create a record of the young girl’s development and to monitor her state of health. When Dmitriev adopted the child from a children’s home, she was weak and her physical development was severely retarded. There are no grounds for any other assessment of the photographs. They were kept on Dmitriev’s home computer and intended for presentation, if necessary, to the adoption services. They were not printed, edited, or shared with anyone else. The adoption services, in monitoring the young girl’s condition, always concluded that her adoptive parent had created all necessary conditions for her sustenance, upbringing and education.

The expert assessment of the evidence, which is the only possible formal grounds for recognising the photographs as pornographic, was carried out by specialists from the Centre for Socio-cultural Evaluation, a body which has no professional competence in this area. The Centre for Socio-Cultural Evaluation has previously acquired a dubious reputation and provoked public indignation through its assessments of materials used in the prosecutions of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the case of the slogan “Kill the Slave in Yourself!” and Pussy Riot, along with many other similar cases.

The president of the National Institute of Sexology, Lev Shcheglov, at the invitation of Dmitriev’s defence attorney, attended the trial as a specialist witness and was cross-examined in court. He told the court that the photographs in the case could not be considered pornographic material. He also sharply criticised the expert assessment carried out for the prosecution and referred to its conclusions as “an almost comic document.”

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers that the prosecution of Yury Dmitriev is political in character, intended to put an end to his activities in commemorating the victims of Stalin’s political repression, and also to smear the International Memorial Society, its member organisations, and the Society’s historical, educational and human rights work.

The criminal case against Yury Dmitriev was brought against the background of an ongoing campaign to discredit Memorial and has been used to intensify that campaign. Dmitriev was arrested two weeks before New Year 2017 when everyone in Russia is preparing for the long winter holidays and is not especially attentive to the latest political news. Two days after the New Year’s holiday ended, on 10 January 2017, a 14-minute programme was broadcast on the nationwide TV channel Rossiya-24, entitled “What does the Memorial Society have to hide?” which included photographs of Dmitriev’s adopted daughter. By law an investigator would have been able to provide journalists with photographs of the young girl only with the agreement of her guardian. No one approached Dmitriev with such a request. Memorial’s legal team regard these facts as further confirmation of the political character of his case.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers Yury Dmitriev to be a political prisoner and demands that the criminal charges against him be dropped.

We call on everyone to sign the petition "[We demand the restoration of due process of law In the case of Yury Dmitriev](#)".

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

For more information about the case of Yury Dmitriev, see [here](#).

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