



United States Mission to the OSCE

Abduction, Detention, and Sentencing of Ukrainian Citizens by the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 3, 2016

The United States condemns the continued detention of Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov, Oleksander Kolchenko, Stanislav Klich, Mykola Karpyuk, Akhtem Chygoz, and all other Ukrainians unjustly held in Russia, separatist-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine, and in Russia-occupied Crimea. Human rights groups estimate there are currently at least 20 such cases. These raise serious concerns about Russia's respect for the rule of law, and its international obligations and commitments to protect the ability of those detained to exercise their rights.

A total of 595 days have passed since Nadiya Savchenko was captured by Russia-backed separatists in Ukraine and taken across the border into Russia. The United States continues to monitor Ms. Savchenko's trial and her well-being closely. Today, Ms. Savchenko, who continues her hunger strike in protest of her ongoing imprisonment and prosecution, will make her closing argument together with her legal team. The court refused to hear all evidence or summon defense witnesses to testify during the trial. Ms. Savchenko's trial and imprisonment violate the basic principles of rule of law, and we urge the court to release her immediately, and allow her to return to Ukraine without delay.

Mr. Sentsov and Mr. Kolchenko have both been recognized as political prisoners by the Memorial Human Rights Center in Russia. Russian human rights defenders describe their trials and sentences (20 years and 10 years, respectively) as "ideologically motivated terror" against opponents of Russia's military intervention in Crimea and its subsequent occupation. We are also concerned by reports that they and their Ukrainian co-defendants have been transferred to prisons in remote areas of Russia, and in some cases have been subjected to mistreatment.

The charges against Ukrainian citizens held for politically-motivated reasons should be dismissed, and in the case of those being held within Russia, they should be allowed to return to Ukraine. By failing to do so, Russia continues to contravene its OSCE commitments, as well as its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.