

## Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

Ref.: UA RUS 15/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

21 April 2026

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 60/21.

In this connection, I wish to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information received concerning the prosecution and imprisonment of Yuri Dmitriev, a 69-year-old historian and human rights defender and head of the Karelia branch of the human rights organization International Memorial, namely: **1) the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of Yuri Dmitriev, merely because of his longstanding work as a historian and human rights defender documenting the victims of the Great Purge in Karelia, 2) his poor conditions of detention, amounting to ill-treatment, including the imposition of repeated disciplinary sanctions for failing to comply with internal rules of the colony due to his physical inability and chronic illnesses, and 3) his rapidly deteriorating health, due to a lack of access to timely and adequate medical care, including necessary oncological diagnostics and specialist monitoring for multiple serious chronic conditions.**

Dmitriev suffers from a suspected prostate tumour, which remains unconfirmed due to the prolonged absence of histological examination, as well as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, chronic pancreatitis, gastric ulcer disease, and progressive loss of hearing and vision. His detention conditions have resulted in marked physical deterioration, including persistent prostate pain, reduced mobility, and worsening of his cardiovascular, pancreatic, and urological conditions. The lack of proper oncological assessment and treatment, alongside the neglect of his other chronic illnesses, places him at imminent risk of life-threatening complications and further decline, including potential progression of the prostate tumour.

According to the information received:

### **Historical Repression, Mass Graves, and the Work of Yuri Dmitriev**

Yuri Dmitriev is a historian and human rights defender who has dedicated his life to documenting and commemorating the victims of the Great Terror («Большой террор»), a period of political repression under Joseph Stalin, during which it is estimated that over one million Soviet citizens were executed or died in detention between 1930 and 1940. Dmitriev began his work in the 1980s, focusing on identifying execution sites and mass graves in his native Republic of Karelia, as well as the identities of those buried there. He discovered the execution site of the Solovki prison camp, the largest known site in Karelia, where at least eight thousand people were killed and buried. He also assisted in documenting the names of ten thousand individuals executed in Sandarmokh

Forest, and ensured that all 1,297 men and women shot and buried at Krasny Bor were named. To preserve the memory of the victims, Dmitriev established an annual commemoration event at Sandarmokh in 1998 and has authored several books on the Great Purge and mass graves in Karelia. For his work, he has received awards both in Russia and internationally.

Between 1930 and 1940, no official body in Russia has been mandated to establish a comprehensive public record of atrocities committed during the Great Purge or to investigate individual or collective responsibility. The 1991 Russian law on the rehabilitation of victims of political repression formally acknowledges violations by the Soviet state and provides a procedure to clear the names of those imprisoned or executed for political crimes. However, the law has been largely ineffective, and obtaining compensation remains extremely difficult. Many mass burial sites from this period, including former labor camps such as Dalstroj, Belomorkanal, and Volgograd, have never been systematically inventoried or protected, leaving the fate of more than a million disappeared persons unresolved.

As head of the Karelia branch of International Memorial, Dmitriev has faced persecution in connection with his work. In 2016, Russian authorities and the Russian Military and Historical Society, with support from the Ministry of Defense, began excavations at Sandarmokh under the pretext of identifying Red Army soldiers, contrary to the documented history of the site. Dmitriev and International Memorial repudiated the government's hypothesis. Relatives of victims petitioned authorities to halt the excavations to protect the memorial, which is officially recognised as a regional historical and cultural site and may legally only be disturbed following a formal assessment. Despite these objections, excavations continued without proper authorisation, reportedly uncovering only five individuals.

Reports further indicate that the Russian authorities have sought to obscure the historical record by excavating mass graves under misleading pretences and by undermining the work of organizations such as International Memorial, including through its designation as a "foreign agent." Teachers, students, and researchers engaging with historical investigations of the Gulag and other repressions have allegedly faced intimidation, including interrogations over participation in history contests addressing the Soviet past. These measures have placed Dmitriev and his work at the centre of ongoing pressures related to the commemoration and documentation of historical repressions in Karelia.

### **Prosecution**

Yuri Dmitriev and his wife have two biological children and, in 2008, adopted a third child. Medical records from the time of adoption and subsequent years show that due to the child's health and physical underdevelopment, dedicated care and support were required. Dmitriev consistently provided this care, achieving marked improvements in the child's physical and mental state, documenting progress as recommended by medical authorities. Over eight years, no concerns regarding the child's care were ever raised by relatives or other contacts.

In early December 2016, law enforcement in Petrozavodsk received an anonymous letter accusing Dmitriev of taking inappropriate photographs of the child, accompanied by two images. The origin of the letter remains unknown, and authorities appear not to have investigated it. On 10 December 2016, authorities summoned Dmitriev under the pretext of clarifying concerns about his hunting rifles. Upon returning home, he discovered a break-in. Three days later, police arrested him, searching his apartment and personal computer, finding a file including photographs of the child. During this operation, the child was removed from school and transferred to a rehabilitation centre without notification to Dmitriev or his family. The child was last seen by siblings at the centre and expressed fear at being transferred.

On 15 December 2016, a criminal case was opened against Dmitriev for allegedly using minors to produce pornographic materials. Authorities detained him purportedly to prevent “pressure on the child,” and guardianship was transferred to the child’s biological grandmother. In January 2017, medical and psychological examinations of the child found no evidence of abuse, and the child testified that Dmitriev had never acted inappropriately. The child was subsequently moved 600 km from Petrozavodsk to the biological grandmother’s home; in February 2017 the child sent Dmitriev a letter expressing hope for Dmitriev’s release.

In April 2017, Dmitriev was charged with three counts of child abuse and one count of illegal firearm possession. The child abuse charges relied on selective photographs and witness statements, while the firearms charge concerned modified parts of a hunting rifle. Following a year-long trial, in April 2018, the court acquitted Dmitriev of child abuse, confirming that the photographs were innocuous and related to monitoring the child’s recovery, but found him guilty of illegal firearm possession, sentencing him to two years and six months, with the remainder of the term served under house arrest in Petrozavodsk.

A week later, the prosecutor and the child’s biological grandmother appealed, and all written communication between Dmitriev and the child was abruptly cut off. In May–June 2018, the child was re-interrogated under reportedly aggressive questioning, which formed the basis of a new charge of sexual assault of a person under 14 years. Dmitriev was re-arrested in August 2018. Subsequent hearings, beginning in December 2018, continued for two years.

In October 2019, over 200 Russian writers, scientists, and cultural figures publicly stressed that the lack of objectivity in Dmitriev’s prosecution had harmed the child. In April 2020, two cases of COVID-19 were reported at the Petrozavodsk pre-trial detention centre, yet appeals for Dmitriev’s placement under house arrest, given his prolonged pre-trial detention and health concerns, were dismissed. In June 2020, 400 international scientists called for his release and protection of academic freedom.

In July 2020, the Petrozavodsk City Court found Dmitriev guilty of child sexual abuse and sentenced him to three and a half years, acquitting him of other charges. In September 2020, the Supreme Court of Karelia finalized the appeal, increased

his sentence to 13 years in a high-security colony, and remanded the case to lower courts for further hearings on charges of producing pornography using minors and lecherous acts. Despite Dmitriev's legal representatives filing a third appeal, on 24 November 2020 the court ordered Dmitriev to remain in custody.

On 27 December 2021, following this third round of proceedings, Dmitriev was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, a sentence upheld by the appellate and cassation courts on 15 March 2022 and 17 January 2023, respectively.

OSCE Member States and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe have raised concerns that the court prosecuted Dmitriev on fabricated charges and in proceedings that did not meet fair trial standards. They urged Russian authorities to release him, restore his human rights, particularly given his age and the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders, including Dmitriev. While in detention, he has continued to be recognized with awards in Russia and abroad for his scientific and human rights work, and his book *Sandarmokh – the Place of Memory* has been published.

### **State of Health and Conditions of Detention**

Throughout his detention, Dmitriev has suffered from severe chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, chronic pancreatitis, urological disorders, hearing and vision loss, and most notably, a prostate tumour identified in 2022. Despite repeated requests, he has not received consultation with an oncologist, diagnostic procedures including biopsy, or any specialized treatment. Dmitriev has been repeatedly transferred between the medical-sanitary unit № 13 in Yavas and medical correctional institution № 3 (ЛПУ-3) in Barashevo, yet access to proper medical care has consistently been denied. The lack of treatment has caused persistent pain, difficulties with sitting and urination, and progressive deterioration of his overall health.

Authorities have also subjected Dmitriev to punitive isolation (SHIZO) due to health-related limitations that make it difficult or impossible for him to perform some types of daily requirements or procedures required of all detainees within the facility.

Notably, in March 2023, he spent fifteen days in SHIZO for sitting on his bed due to dizziness from medication; on 17 January 2025, six days for “incorrect execution of morning exercises”; in July 2025, five days for “inadequate performance of exercises”; and on 1 August 2025, directly in the medical unit for sitting on the bed shortly before the designated time due to dizziness. These punitive measures exacerbated his physical suffering and violated standards for the treatment of detainees.

At present, Yuri Dmitriev remains in colony IK-18 in Potma, Mordovia, under inadequate detention conditions, has been denied essential medical care, including oncological treatment, and has been subjected to punitive measures despite his severe chronic health conditions.

By means of this urgent appeal, I call on the Russian authorities to ensure, without further delay, the immediate release of Yuri Dmitriev, 69 years old, and to provide him with timely and adequate medical assistance, in full recognition of his inherent human dignity as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both ratified by the Russian Federation on 16 October 1973. As a State party, the Russian Federation is legally bound to implement these instruments in good faith and to ensure that all individuals deprived of liberty enjoy their rights without discrimination or undue restriction. In accordance with article 9 of the ICCPR, any detention of Dmitriev solely on the basis of his exercise of fundamental freedoms – including his research and efforts to preserve the memory of those repressed – is unlawful, as affirmed by the Human Rights Committee (general comment No. 35, para. 35). His continued detention underscores the political motivation behind his prosecution and reinforces the urgent need for his release and provision of necessary medical care.

I further recall your Excellency's Government's obligations under article 10 of the ICCPR, which requires that all persons deprived of liberty be treated with humanity and respect for their inherent dignity, and article 12 of the ICESCR, which guarantees the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. These obligations include access to appropriate medical examinations, specialist consultations, and continuous monitoring of chronic health conditions. The failure to ensure such care constitutes a violation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), in particular rules 1, 24, 25, 27, and 30.

As noted above, Dmitriev suffers from a combination of serious, chronic illnesses, including a prostate tumour, the nature of which remains undiagnosed due to the absence of essential diagnostics, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, chronic pancreatitis, gastric ulcer disease, and progressive loss of hearing and vision. Despite documented and persistent symptoms – such as severe pain in the prostate region, difficulty in sitting, and painful urination – he has not been provided with the oncological evaluation recommended by medical personnel in 2022, nor with the regular specialist monitoring required for his other chronic conditions.

Repeated placements in the medical correctional facility LIU-3 between 2023 and 2025 have not resulted in any oncological consultation or biopsy, notwithstanding medical indications. During his most recent hospitalisation in November 2025, only an ultrasound and urological examination were performed, resulting in a preliminary diagnosis of benign prostatic hyperplasia that remains unconfirmed without histological testing. The absence of proper diagnostics over such a prolonged period prevents the formulation of an accurate diagnosis and delays urgently needed treatment.

The lack of adequate medical care has contributed to a deterioration of Dmitriev's health and, in turn, has resulted in disciplinary sanctions for behaviour directly linked to his medical condition. These sanctions include placement in a punishment cell (SHIZO) for sitting on his bed due to dizziness caused by medication, and for being unable to perform morning exercise routines because of his chronic illnesses. The imposition of disciplinary penalties in response to medically related

limitations contradicts international standards for the treatment of detainees and exacerbates the risk to his physical and mental well-being.

Furthermore, I remind your Excellency's Government of the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment under article 7 of the ICCPR. Denying essential medical care, imposing disciplinary sanctions for actions caused by illness, and exposing an older person detainee with severe chronic diseases to conditions of detention that aggravate his suffering may amount to treatment contrary to article 7.

States have a heightened duty of care to individuals deprived of their liberty. As clarified in general comment No. 36 of the Human Rights Committee, any loss of life occurring in custody creates a presumption of arbitrary deprivation of life attributable to the State unless a thorough, impartial investigation establishes compliance with article 6 of the ICCPR. The current lack of medical monitoring and essential diagnostics poses serious and foreseeable risks to Dmitriev's life.

In light of the concerns detailed above, I urge the immediate provision of comprehensive medical examinations by qualified specialists, including oncological diagnostics, and the adoption of all necessary measures to safeguard his health and life. Given the gravity of his medical condition, age, and the long-term absence of adequate medical care, I further call for consideration of alternatives to detention, in accordance with Russia's obligations under international human rights law.

I would appreciate receiving information as soon as possible from your Excellency's Government on steps taken to ensure Dmitriev's rights under the applicable international instruments. As it is my responsibility, under the mandate entrusted to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek clarification of all cases brought to my attention, I would also be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the aforementioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on the legal grounds for the continued detention of Yuri Dmitriev and explain how this is compatible with Russia's obligations under international human rights law.
3. Please provide detailed information on his current physical and mental health, access to specialist medical care, and his ability to communicate freely with his lawyer and family.
4. Please provide information on measures taken to ensure timely and adequate medical care for all his diagnosed conditions, including the provision of full oncological diagnostics and treatment in line with medical standards.
5. Please indicate what measures are taken to ensure that disciplinary sanctions are not imposed for conduct linked to illness, age-related limitations, or disability, and how these measures align with the Nelson

## Mandela Rules.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that Yuri Dmitriev is immediately released as the case against him and his subsequent sentence were politically motivated to punish him for his human rights work as a leader of Memorial. I have repeatedly raised his case to the authorities and asked for his release from detention, in my reports to the UN Human Rights Council in 2023, 2024, and 2025 ([A/HRC/54/54](#), para. 68, [A/HRC/57/59](#), paras. 41 and 150(g); [A/HRC/60/59](#), para. 52). In the meantime, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations in custody and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

I may publicly express my concerns in the near future as, in my view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that I have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mariana Katzarova  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation