

Petition

Freedom for Maksym Butkevych!

Human Rights Organizations and Activists demand Freedom for Maksym Butkevych, a Ukrainian POW, Illegally Sentenced by Russian occupiers

On March 10, 2023, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation announced that Ukrainian human rights defender and serviceman Maksym Butkevych, who had been captured by the Russian forces in the Luhansk region past summer, was sentenced by so-called "Supreme Court of the Luhansk People's Republic" to 13 years in prison. He was tried together with two other Ukrainian prisoners, Viktor Pokhozhey and Vladyslav Shel, who were sentenced to 8.5 and 18.5 years. We believe that the case against Butkevych was fabricated and that his confession was forced.

Maksym Butkevych is a Ukrainian human rights defender and journalist. He is co-founder of the "Bez Kordoniv" ("No Borders") project, an organization created to support asylum seekers in Ukraine and IDPs. He is a life-long anti-racist and a committed fighter against hate speech in all forms. He is also one of the founding members of ZMINA Human Rights Center and Hromadske public radio. As a journalist, Butkevych worked for a number of Ukrainian as well as international media outlets. He joined the ranks of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in March 2022 and was captured in June of the same year in the vicinity of Zolote and Girske villages on the territory of the Russia-occupied Luhansk region.

According to Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, the so-called "Supreme Court of the Luhansk People's Republic" found Butkevych guilty of the ill treatment of civilians, of using banned methods of warfare, of causing intentional damage to another person's property, and attempting to commit murder by firing at a residential building with a grenade launcher in Severodonetsk, Luhansk region on June 4, 2022. Except for the staged confession that was recorded and circulated by Russian media, no other evidence has been disclosed. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the unit "Berlingo," to which Butkevych belonged, had neither been deployed nor participated in hostilities in the territory of Severodonetsk.

Until today, no information about the charges brought against Butkevych has been made public. Butkevych was not provided with a lawyer and was not given a chance to have a fair trial. The conditions of his detention and the other circumstances of his captivity were not properly monitored by international organizations, in particular because Russia refuses to allow independent observers to visit the detention centers it creates in the Russia-occupied territories.

Almost immediately after Butkevych was taken prisoner, a number of Russian propagandist media published manifestly false and slanderous information about him: they ascribed to him statements which he had never made and views, which are opposite to the ones that he held and professed publicly. All of this is evidence that Russians were actively fabricating his case, painting Butkevych as a violent person capable of committing war crimes since the very beginning of his captivity.

We condemn Russia's practice of using prisoners of war as tools of propaganda and demand freedom for Maksym Butkevych, other Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian hostages.

We also demand that the Russian Federation allows international observers to visit prisoners of war and civilian hostages to monitor the conditions of their detention and prevent human rights violations.

We call on the President of Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to persist in exerting pressure on the Russian Federation and demand the immediate release of all citizens who are illegally held prisoners by the occupation regime.

We call on the international community to intensify sanctions against Russia for its violations of the international humanitarian law and of the human rights.

Firstname, name

Street

Location

Mail

Profession /organization

Location and date

signature

Please sign and send this petition to the European Civic Forum, PO Box, CH-4001 Basel or to: ch@forumcivique.org

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