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Udaltsov Is a 'Prisoner of Conscience'

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Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov on Wednesday became Russia's third current "prisoner of conscience," Amnesty International said, denouncing his latest 15-day arrest as politically motivated.

Udaltsov was jailed last week for participating in an unsanctioned rally to uphold freedom of assembly. The rally was the latest in a campaign where activists gather on the 31st of each month with so many days to mark Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to free assembly.

There are "serious grounds" to believe that Udaltsov's arrest was "politically motivated," the rights watchdog said on its web site. He was "persecuted exclusively for peacefully exercising his rights."

Russian officials had not commented on the decision as of Wednesday afternoon. Udaltsov, 34, who has been detained more than 100 times during his political career, went on a hunger strike last week to protest his arrest.

The country's other two "prisoners of conscience" are former Yukos CEO Mikhail

Khodorkovsky and his business partner Platon Lebedev, to whom Amnesty conferred the status in May, following their second trial on economic charges, which it regarded as politically motivated.

Opposition leaders Ilya Yashin and Boris Nemtsov did brief stints as "prisoners of conscience" in January, when they were jailed for five and 15 days, respectively, for a rally on Dec. 31. They relinquished the status upon release.

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