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Human Rights Watch Calls on FIFA to Help Free Chechen Activist

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Oyub Titiyev **Youtube / CaucasianKnot**

Human Rights Watch is calling on FIFA to lobby for the release of an activist who has been behind bars since January in Chechnya.

Although there will be no 2018 World Cup matches held in Chechnya, the North Caucasus republic's capital Grozny will be the home base for Egypt's national team during the tournament. FIFA previously authorized Chechnya to serve as a World Cup training base.

Human Rights Watch is urging FIFA to put pressure on the Kremlin for the release of a Chechen activist before the tournament's opening match on June 14.

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Oyub Titiyev, 60, was arrested on January 9 on what Human Rights Watch claims were “bogus marijuana possession charges” and has been imprisoned ever since. Titiyev is Grozny’s director of Memorial, a leading human rights group in Russia and the only human rights group that continues to operate on the ground in the republic.

If convicted, he will spend a maximum of 10 years in prison.

“FIFA recently adopted human rights policies to guide its operations,” said Rachel Denber, deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Now, just a few weeks before the World Cup starts, it’s game time. Oyub Titiyev’s freedom is on the line, and FIFA should make full use of its leverage, at the highest levels.”

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