

Crimean Activist Balukh Enters 100th Day of Hunger Strike

June 27, 2018



Krym Realii / Youtube

A Crimean activist who opposed Russia's annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine has entered the 101st day of his hunger strike inside a Russian prison.

A Russian court <u>sentenced</u> Crimean farmer Volodymyr Balukh to three years and seven months on arms possession charges in 2017, though he alleges he was arrested for flying a Ukrainian flag outside his home. <u>Recognized</u> as a political prisoner by the human rights group Memorial, Balukh <u>launched</u> a hunger strike on March 19 to protest new charges <u>claiming</u> he assaulted a prison guard.

Related article: Detained Ukrainian Activist Kolchenko Ends Hunger Strike in Russian Jail

Tuesday, June 26, marked the 100th day of Balukh's hunger strike, the Krym.Realii news website reported.

"After several months of starving... Volodymyr is completely exhausted, and his condition is close to critical," says an online petition <u>launched</u> in his support.

Balukh <u>reportedly</u> expressed solidarity with anti-government demonstrations by hanging a Ukrainian flag and leaving it draped outside his Crimean home well after the peninsula was annexed in March 2014.

Memorial <u>concludes</u> with "a high degree of probability" that he was charged with arms possession for hanging a Ukrainian-language sign honoring the protesters who were killed during Ukraine's Maidan revolution.

The activist has lost 30 kilograms on a diet of water that for a time included crackers and "kisel," sweet juice thickened with starch, according to the petition.

The petition, <u>started</u> by the same campaign seeking the release of Crimean filmmaker Oleg Sentsov — himself on day 45 of his hunger strike in Russian jail — calls on supporters to appeal for Balukh's release with the Russian authorities.

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