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Jailed Ukrainian Filmmaker Pens Letter on 51st Day of Hunger Strike

July 09, 2018



Sergei Pivovarov / Reuters

Detained Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov has sent a letter to Ukrainian actress Rimma Zyubnina, describing his health and prison conditions.

Sentsov was sentenced to 20 years in a maximum security prison in 2015 after being found guilty of setting fire to two offices in Crimea, including one belonging to Russia's ruling political party, after Moscow annexed the territory from Ukraine. He has been on a hunger strike since May 14, demanding the release of Ukrainians he says are illegally jailed in Russia.

In the letter, a copy of which Zyubnina posted on Facebook on Saturday, Sentsov writes: "I am feeling fine, despite the 51st day [of the hunger strike], but, of course, my health isn't as wonderful as some authorized human rights defenders may believe — everyone sees what they want to see."

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Russia's human rights ombudsman, Tatyana Moskalkova, reportedly visited Sentsov in the penal colony where he is being held in northern Siberia late last month. She reported that the activist's health was "satisfactory, though there is concern over how it will develop," according to Interfax.

Sentsov also complained about the delays with which mail gets to him in the jail.

"First it's read by the censor and other interested persons, then it's unsealed and given to me, which might not be on the same day," he wrote.

"Generally, if an answer is received after a week, then that's a normal speed under this system," he added.

Critics say that Sentsov, who has warned that he will "go until the end" with his hunger strike, was targeted for his political views and his opposition to Crimea's annexation.

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