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Journalist Kriger's Last Word in Court: 'I Fully Understood the Risks of This Profession in Russia'

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Artyom Krieger. **@sotavisionmedia**

Artyom Kriger is one of four journalists currently facing nearly six years in prison on charges of "extremism" over alleged ties to the late opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Kriger — along with Antonina Favorskaya, Konstantin Gabov and Sergei Karelin — was arrested last year on charges of "participating in an extremist community."

The journalists are accused of "collecting material, preparing and editing videos" for Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and his Navalny LIVE YouTube channel.

Favorskaya and Kriger's employer, the independent news outlet SOTAVision, has repeatedly denied the accusations, saying neither journalist has ever worked for Navalny's organizations.

Favorskaya and Kriger delivered their final statements in closed court hearings this week

ahead of the verdict. Favorskaya's letter containing her speech was blocked by prison censors.

The Moscow Times publishes Kriger's courtroom speech, edited for length and clarity.

My name is Artyom Kriger, I'm 24 years old, and I am writing my final statement from a cell in a special unit of the Matrosskaya Tishina pre-trial detention center in February 2025. As I write the first lines of this speech, I realize that if someone were to read just the beginning, they might assume it's the work of a highly dangerous criminal awaiting sentencing — because who else would be kept in isolation in a Moscow detention center in 2025, if not a criminal? That's the logical conclusion, right?

But things are not so simple in a country called the Russian Federation. The truth is that this final statement isn't being written by a dangerous criminal but by an ordinary journalist — Artyom Kriger. I've been held in custody and isolated from society for the past eight months, and I've been added to [state financial watchdog] Rosfinmonitoring's list of extremists and terrorists simply because, for four and a half years, I diligently carried out my professional duties as an honest, incorruptible and independent journalist. The core of the accusation against me is 'participation in an extremist group.' In this context, we can recall the great writer George Orwell, who said: 'In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.' I would paraphrase Orwell and say: in [President Vladimir] Putin's Russia, being an honest and professional journalist — not a disgraceful propagandist — is treated as a criminal offense and extremist activity.

Related article: Prosecutors Request Nearly 6-Year Jail Sentences for Journalists Accused of Navalny-Linked 'Extremism'

So how did it happen that Artyom Kriger ended up in prison in 2024? Let's take a brief look at my life. I had always wanted to be a journalist. I've always loved filming videos, creating reports on different topics, coming up with storylines and generating ideas for segments. Just as someone might dream of becoming a pilot, a firefighter, a writer, a manager or a doctor, I always dreamed of being a journalist. My eyes lit up and my heart raced at the thought of bringing information to people through videos, articles and other types of media. Back in school, I started creating video clips, brainstorming story ideas and writing about a range of topics, all with a single goal in mind: to develop my skills, gain experience and make sure this path was truly mine. From the school classroom, I already knew that my life would be inextricably linked to journalism.

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I was, am and will continue to be committed to social and political journalism. I fully understood the risks of this profession in Russia. Being an independent, honest and professional journalist and working with independent media here means constantly facing the threat of imprisonment, violence and serious financial problems. The best expression to sum it all up might be: 'to experience firsthand all the charms of a repressive state.'

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I didn't want to run. I didn't want to live in fear. I wanted to prove that it is possible — and

necessary — to do journalism in Russia. If I had to pay for this belief with my freedom or my life, then so be it. That's not an exaggeration — I truly believe this, as I write these words in February 2025, as part of my final statement in a criminal case.

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I stayed in Russia, creating, building, generating journalistic ideas, conducting interviews, filming vox pops and broadcasting from Moscow on every major story. When I had the rare chance to leave Russia for a few days to rest, many friends urged me not to come back. But I always replied, 'Why should I be afraid? What am I doing wrong? I'm just a journalist — not a criminal.' And that's how I lived and worked — until June 18, 2024, when they came for me.

They broke into my apartment, pinned me to the floor face down and took me to a pre-trial detention center, physically stripping me of my freedom. Now I can't work. All I can do is sit in this cell — and write my final statement.

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I am a true patriot of Russia. I do not want Russia to be in isolation, but to be respected throughout the world — not feared. I want us to have freedom within our own country so that people like me can work in journalism without fearing for our freedom or our lives. I believe in the transfer of power and the separation of powers. I want Russia to become a truly democratic state, not remain a totalitarian country. Is that really so difficult?

If, in 2025, I have to pay for this conviction and this position with my freedom, then I am ready for that. No one will ever force me to believe in the madness that the prison system, the investigative bodies, the prosecutors and the courts are trying to impose on me — that I am an extremist, a criminal, and that I deserve to be imprisoned because I broke the law. I will never believe that. Until my last breath and heartbeat, I will continue to say that everything that happened to me since June 18, 2024 — from the day of my arrest to the day of my eventual release — is nothing but utter madness and absurdity.

Let history be the judge — it will dot all the i's.

And I will finish my final statement with the following words: Freedom for Artyom Kriger! Let me out! Down with the madness and absurdity! May common sense prevail! The forces of good are on my side!

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