

DUBLIN

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
Second Floor, Grattan House
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Russia: Human rights defender Lev Ponomarev detained during peaceful protest and beaten by police

On 14 March 2020, human rights defender **Lev Ponomarev** was violently detained during a peaceful protest against political repression held in front of the Federal Security Service (FSS) headquarters in Moscow. He was taken to a police station, where he was beaten. He was released on the same day and had to be hospitalised.

Lev Ponomarev is a human rights defender and the head of the “For Human Rights” movement which documents and reports on a wide spectrum of human rights issues including freedom of expression, refugee rights, trial monitoring and freedom of association. “For Human Rights” was liquidated following a November 2019 ruling by the Supreme Court of Russia but Lev Ponomarev announced that the new organisation would be launched under the same name and would work without official registration. Lev Ponomarev is a member of the Moscow Helsinki Group. He was also involved in founding the Human Rights Center “Memorial”.

On 14 March 2020, a series of solo pickets was held outside the FSS building in Moscow, demanding justice for victims of political repression, and opposing the constitutional amendments which have enabled the current President to stay in power for another 16 years. The protesters planned to recreate the first mass rally of the late USSR held in 1989, when hundreds of people surrounded the KGB headquarters in memory of the repressed. During the protest on 14 March 2020, more than 50 people were detained, including human rights defender Lev Ponomarev who was violently detained by the police and taken to the police department in the Tagansky district, where he was subjected to physical abuse. This caused the 78-year-old human rights defender a hematoma on the face, and he had to be hospitalized as he had previously suffered a heart attack. He was released without charges on the same day.

On 18 March 2020, Lev Ponomarev filed a complaint with the Moscow prosecutor’s office concerning the incident. He also sent letters to the presidential council on the development of civil society and human rights, and the human rights ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova, denouncing the illegal actions of the police.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arbitrary detention and physical abuse of human rights defender Lev Ponomarev, as it believes that these acts are directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate human rights work in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the arbitrary detention and physical abuse of Lev Ponomarev, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Lev Ponomarev, and provide him with appropriate medical treatment, if necessary;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

