

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2017		88	Russia	Yuri Dmitriev
	2020			

Announcement

The international historical, educational, charitable and human rights society [Memorial](#), based in Moscow, asks you to sign a petition in support of imprisoned historian and Gulag researcher **Yuri Dmitriev** in Karelia. The petition calls for Yuri Dmitriev to be placed under house arrest for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic or until his court case is over.

The petition can be signed in Russian, English, French, Italian, German, Hebrew, Polish, Czech, and Finnish. It can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

This is the second petition for Yuri Dmitriev. The first, from 2017, can be found [here](#).

Please find below:

- (1) a NCH case summary
- (2) the petition text in English.

P.S. Another historian, Sergei Koltyrin – who had defended Yuri Dmitriev and was subsequently imprisoned under charges similar to his – died in a prison hospital in Medvezhegorsk, Karelia, on 2 April 2020.

Please sign the petition immediately.

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NCH CASE SUMMARY

On 13 December 2016, the Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested Karelian historian **Yuri Dmitriev** (1956–) and held him in remand prison on charges of “preparing and circulating child pornography” and “depravity involving a minor [his foster child, eleven or twelve years old in 2017].” The arrest came after an anonymous tip: the individual and his motives, as well as how he got the private information, remain unknown. Dmitriev said the “pornographic” photos of his foster child were taken

because medical workers had asked him to monitor the health and development of the girl, who was malnourished and unhealthy when he and his wife took her in at age three with the intention of adopting her. Each photograph was accompanied by notation of the girl's height, weight, and general health. Many of them appeared to have been taken ahead of scheduled visits by social workers, to document that she had been well treated. According to social-services reports, nothing suspicious was ever noted. Dmitriev was also charged with illegal possession of a weapon stemming from a piece of a vintage hunting rifle that investigators found in his flat – a relic his lawyer said Dmitriev recovered during a research dig. Dmitriev denied all allegations, saying that he had been framed because of his activities as a historian. Colleagues in Russia and abroad argued that the charges were trumped-up to punish him for his past research and to silence him in the future.

As the head of the Karelian chapter of the rights-advocacy group Memorial, Dmitriev had assembled a Book of Remembrance that included the names of 13,000 victims of the Great Terror (1936–1939). In 1997, he and his colleagues Irina Fliege and Veniamin Iofe, discovered the Sandarmokh and Krasny Bor mass graves, where more than 9,500 prisoners representing over sixty ethnic groups from the Solovki GULAG camp were executed and buried by Stalin's secret police NKVD in 1937–1938. In addition, over strong resistance from Karelian security agents, Dmitriev lobbied to have the spot memorialized (today there is a large stone memorial at the site). He had participated in a Memorial project to create an online database giving details about some 40,000 NKVD agents, who were directly responsible for the murders of some one million Soviet citizens during the Great Terror, as well as the persecution of millions more (the “executioners’ database”). Shortly after the publication, Memorial started receiving threats and unambiguous “recommendations” to end the project. More than 33,000 people signed an online petition denouncing the charges against Dmitriev as “a provocation.” Historians and activists from Ukraine and Poland published open letters of support. During the investigation and while Dmitriev was in custody, the latter's latest research – 450 pages – and his entire research archive disappeared without a trace. In August [2016], for the first time in 20 years, the Karelian government and the Russian Orthodox Church declined from taking part in commemorations in Sandarmokh. Large numbers of historians, political analysts, writers and others spoke out in Dmitriev's defense.

On 1 June 2017, Dmitriev's trial before a local court in Petrozavodsk (Karelia's capital) began. On 25 July 2017, the Memorial Human Rights Center demanded his release and an end to what it called a political trial. On 26 December 2017, a group of experts ruled that the photos were not pornographic. Prosecutors requested a third assessment of the photos. On 27 December 2017, the court in Petrozavodsk granted the request but at the same time ordered to release Dmitriev from pretrial custody by 28 January 2018. Dmitriev would be barred from leaving the city without permission while the investigation continued. In the week of 8 January 2018, Dmitriev was due to begin enforced psychiatric testing to determine whether he had “sexual deviations” amid fears he would be falsely

declared insane notwithstanding the fact that a previous psychiatric evaluation had declared him to be of sound mind.

On 20 March 2018, the prosecutor requested a nine-year prison sentence for Dmitriev. On 5 April 2018, Dmitriev was acquitted of the child pornography charge, but not of the charge of illegally possessing a weapon. He was sentenced to three months of probation and community service. On 13 April 2018, the Petrozavodsk city prosecutor appealed against Dmitriev's acquittal. On 14 June 2018, the Supreme Court of Karelia overturned the acquittal and ordered a retrial. On 28 June 2018, Dmitriev was re-arrested. On 3 July 2018, Dmitriev was charged with pedophilia ("violent acts of a sexual nature committed against a person under fourteen years of age [his adopted daughter].") Both criminal cases against Dmitriev were merged in October 2018. He faced up to twenty years in prison if convicted. On 23 March 2020, the municipal court extended his pretrial detention for another three months. Several thousand people signed a petition calling for Dmitriev to be placed under house arrest for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic.

After two Karelian historians (Yuri Kilin, a history professor at Petrozavodsk State University, and Sergei Verigin) in June 2016 proposed the controversial theory that Sandarmokh could contain hundreds of graves of Soviet prisoners of war held in Finnish concentration camps and then killed by Finnish forces during their occupation of Karelia in World War II, excavations sponsored by the Military Historical Society (a state-funded organization created by President Putin in December 2012, headed by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, and of which Kilin and Verigin were members) took place at Sandarmokh in the summers of 2018 and 2019, uncovering the remains of sixteen corpses that supposedly proved that the killing at Sandarmokh was, at least in part, the work of foreigners. Anatoli Razumov, director of the Center for Recovered Names in St. Petersburg, described this as an attempt to create "hybrid history" designed to confuse and distort. Antti Kujala, a historian at the University of Helsinki, took a similar view.

[Sources: Website about Yuri Dmitriev: <https://dmitrievaffair.com>. Petition for Yuri Dmitriev: <https://www.change.org/p/chairman-of-petrozavodsk-city-court-a-a-sudakov-public-appeal-in-defense-of-yuri-dmitriev>; Memorial petition for Yuri Dmitriev (27 March 2020): <https://www.memo.ru/en-us/memorial/departments/intermemorial/news/375> and ; Yelizaveta Mayetnaya, "[Supporters Rally Around Accused Russian Historian Of Stalin's Crimes](#)," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (27 April 2017); "[Ukrainians Ask for International Protection for Russian Historian Who Is Persecuted by FSB](#)," *Human Rights Information Centre* (28 December 2016); [Petition: Освободить историка Юрия Дмитриева](#) (in Russian); "[Stalin's Shadow: How a Gulag Historian Fell Victim to Russia's Dark Past](#)," *Moscow Times* (9 June 2017); Andrew Osborn, "[Hunter of Stalin's Mass Graves on Trial; Friends Say He's Been Framed](#)," *Reuters* (13 July 2017); Halya Coynash, "[Russia Honours Founders of the Soviet Terror, Jails Historian who Uncovered their Victims](#)," *Human Rights in Ukraine* (3 October 2017); "[Russian Historian Charged With Child Pornography To Be Released](#)," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (27 December 2017); Andrew Osborn, "[Russian Historian who Exposed Stalin's Crimes Faces Enforced Psychiatric Testing](#)," *Reuters* (9 January 2018); Ivan Nechepurenko, "[Gulag Historian Ordered to Undergo Psychiatric Testing in Russia](#)," *New York Times* (11 January 2018); AFP, "[Russian Gulag Historian Faces 9 Years in Prison: Lawyer](#)," *Business Standard* (20 March 2018); Oleg Boldyrev, "[Stalin Crimes Expert Cleared over 'Child Porn'](#)," *BBC News* (6 April

2018); Andrew Kramer, "[Russian Historian Who Exposed Soviet Crimes Is Cleared in Pornography Case](#)," *New York Times* (5 April 2018); "[Yury A. Dmitriev](#)," *Wikipedia* (2 July 2018); "[Russian Stalin Historian Charged With Sexual Assault](#)," *RFE / RL* (3 July 2018); Halya Coynash, "[Russia Arrests Second Historian of Stalin's Terror](#)," *Human Rights in Ukraine* (3 October 2018); PEN International, *Russia's Strident Stifling of Free Speech, 2012–2018* (London: PEN International, 2018), 20; "[Historian of Stalin-Era Crimes in Court for Sexual Assault, his Second Trial this Year](#)" *RFE/RL News* (18 December 2018); Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019: Events of 2018* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 485; Frontline Defenders, *Global Analysis 2018* (Blackrock: Front Line, the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, 2019), 23; EU Statement on Violations of the Rights of Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation (PC.DEL/397/18; 13 April 2018); PEN International, *Case List 2018* (London: PEN, 2019), 89–90; PEN International, "[Fair Trial Must Be Guaranteed for Memorial Historian and Human Rights Activist](#)" (4 November 2019); Jamie Dettmer, "[No End in Sight for Jailed Gulag Historian Yury Dmitriyev](#)," *Voice of America* (4 November 2019); Matthew Luxmoore, "[Russian Historian Jailed On Disputed Pedophilia Charges Dies In Custody](#)," *RFE/RL News* (2 April 2020); Halya Coynash, "[Historian of the Soviet Terror Dies in a Russian Prison](#)," *Human Rights in Ukraine* (3 April 2020); Andrew Higgins, "[He Found One of Stalin's Mass Graves: Now He's in Jail](#)," *New York Times* (27 April 2020).]

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TEXT OF PETITION IN ENGLISH

Free Yury Dmitriev!

27 March 2020

To the Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Karelian Republic Anatoly Vladimirovich Nakvas

On March 23, 2020, Yury Dmitriev, who is being held in a detention facility in Petrozavodsk, was sentenced to remain under arrest for three more months. This means that the peak of the growing coronavirus epidemic will find him in a prison cell.

Yury Dmitriev is 64 years old. He has spent the last three years of his life behind bars, although no one has ever proven him guilty. Quite the opposite: in April of 2018, the court issued a non-guilty verdict on the main charges against him. But new charges, a new investigation, and a new court case have now been underway for almost two years. Yury Alekseevich's health has already been severely impacted: he felt ill all of last fall and into the winter, and this February he had a bad cold which has left him very weak.

On March 24 the World Health Organization published [«Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention»](#) which notes, in particular:

Enhanced consideration should be given to resorting to **non-custodial measures** at all stages of the administration of criminal justice, including at the pre-trial, trial and sentencing as well as post-sentencing stages. **Priority should be given to non-custodial measures for alleged offenders and**

prisoners with low-risk profiles [...] Older people, and those with underlying medical problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, **are more likely to develop serious illness.**

According to medical professionals, the situation in Russian prisons (characterized by severe overcrowding and the inability to observe sufficient hygienic measures) is such that once the coronavirus penetrates an incarceration facility it can spread like wildfire and infect up to 100% of the prison population. Statistics show that the risk of infection for people over 60 years old is very high, while the consequences of infection can be extreme and even deadly for this demographic.

Yury Dmitriev, who has been unjustly persecuted for his principles and for his efforts to restore historical memory, presents not the slightest risk to society, whereas his health, indeed his life, is at great risk in the current situation.

We ask that you take the current emergency situation into account and change his custody requirement from pretrial imprisonment to house arrest, effective immediately and remaining in force until his court case is over.

You can sign the petition [here](#).

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