



Ukrainian Congress Committee of America – Illinois Division
2247 W. Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622

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For additional information:

Oles Strilchuk

Phone: 847 398-5880

E-Mail: strilchuk@sbcglobal.net

Website: www.uccaininois.org

PRESS RELEASE

Protest of Human Rights Violations and Censorship by Ukrainian Government

CHICAGO, IL -- At 5 p.m. on Wednesday September 22nd the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America – Illinois Division will lead a protest at Pioneer Court near 435 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. The protest is to draw attention to the recent violation of human rights of 35 year old Ukrainian historian Ruslan Zabilyj by Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) on September 8th, 2010.

Mr. Zabilyj is the Director of the National Museum and Memorial to the Victims of the Occupational Regime "The Prison at Lonsky". The Memorial at which Mr. Zabilyj works is a recently opened museum to the victims of repressions at the Lonsky prison in Lviv, Ukraine, where thousands of Ukrainian political prisoners suffered under Polish, Nazi and Soviet occupations. Mr. Zabilyj, a historian, oversees the Memorial, and serves as a researcher and archivist.

Mr. Zabilyj was detained at the Kyiv train station by six representatives of SBU and held for over 14 hours at the SBU headquarters in Kyiv. Although he was not formally charged, he was not permitted to leave or to use his cell phone and had to incur threats made to his person and his family. He was further encouraged to resign his position at the Memorial and cease contact with foreign scholars. The SBU interrogators also confiscated Mr. Zabilyj's personal notebook and two compact disks, neither of which was returned upon his release.

Additionally, Mr. Zabilyj was informed that a criminal case had been started against him. The SBU's assault on the National Memorial continued when local SBU units in Lviv blocked the building and prevented its employees and visitors entrance.

Attempts to intimidate Mr. Zabilyj were unsuccessful. On September 9th, Ruslan Zabilyj filed a complaint against the head of the SBU: *"I demand from Mr. Valery Khoroshkovsky an explanation with regard to the action of the SBU officers and to immediately return my private property – the computer and external drives. They contain only copies of historical documents, my research, and personal information. I appeal to you, dear journalists, to together help stop the censorship and pressure, put on history and historians."* He also demanded that his employees and research staff be allowed to return to their offices at the National Memorial.

Mr. Zabilyj's case is not an isolated incident. Since Viktor Yanukovich took office as president of Ukraine in February of 2010, there has been a disturbing return to the strong-armed tactics of the Kremlin, reminiscent of the days of the Soviet Regime. The targets of this censorship include journalists, academics, students and even clergy who are rediscovering Ukrainian history, culture and heritage after decades of Russian imperialist falsification. In response to the growing trend of human rights violations and censorship in Ukraine, protests will be taking place on September 22 in New York City, Ottawa (Canada) and Kyiv (Ukraine).

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