

November 28, 2023

Secretary Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We the undersigned are calling on you to expedite the process to immediately declare that U.S. citizen and journalist Alsu Kurmasheva has been wrongfully detained by Russia.

Alsu has already been held in a detention center in Kazan for more than a month now and charged with failure to self-register as a "foreign agent." Our understanding is that Russia has not officially notified the State Department of her detention — however, the U.S. should not delay its own process due to what appears to be a stalling tactic. We are deeply concerned this has resulted in Alsu not receiving any regular consular visits yet.

The facts of this case are not in dispute. Alsu traveled to Russia in May to attend to her ailing mother. As a U.S. and Russian national, she was admitted under her Russian passport. This was not a work trip, so Alsu did not declare she works for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. She was denied exit in June and placed in detention in October.

Alsu was barred from leaving just two months after Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was detained. We are concerned this is part of a growing pattern of the Russian government attempting to silence journalism through detention.

We also reiterate our call to change current outmoded requirements on designating wrongful detentions, so that the State Department has the authority to quickly declare a detention is unjust when a journalist is taken. Without this change, the department allows an entity to have several weeks (or months) of uncontested opportunity to smear the reputation of the journalist and their employer.

We must push back immediately at what this is — a brazen attempt to silence and punish journalists. We can and must do better.

Sincerely,

The National Press Club

The National Press Club Journalism Institute

The Radio Television Digital News Association

Freedom of the Press Foundation

Women Press Freedom

Coalition For Women In Journalism

Reporters Without Borders

Journalism & Women Symposium

The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Committee to Protect Journalists

National Scholastic Press Association

Associated Collegiate Press

Quill and Scroll