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Attn: Robert S. Gilchrist
Senior Official
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
U.S. Department of State

Dear Mr. Gilchrist,

After years of negotiations, on August 1st the United States and its European allies secured the most extensive prisoner swap with Russia since the end of the cold war. Among the twenty-six individuals released by the Kremlin were several Russian political dissidents. At the time of the release, President Biden noted, “But it also says a lot about us that this deal includes the release of Russian political prisoners. They stood up for democracy and human rights. Their own leaders threw them in prison, the United States helped secure their release as well.”

Concerning Russia, your own State Department report notes “credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; pervasive torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees,” This list of grave human rights abuses by the Russian government goes on and on.

Speaking on behalf the American Mathematical Society Committee on the Human Rights of Mathematicians, we were disappointed that **Azat Miftakhov** was not a part of the prisoner exchange. Because we anticipate that more diplomatic moves are in the offing between the United States and Russia, the Committee wants to bring the Miftakhov case to the attention of the Department of State.

Azat Miftakhov is a mathematics doctoral student at Moscow State University. In February 2019 he was arrested and charged with terrorist activity and the production of explosives. On 18 January 2021, after a convoluted legal journey and largely based on the testimony of a secret witness who testified that Miftakhov had broken a window at a United Russia office and threw inside a smoke grenade, the court found Miftakhov guilty of hooliganism and sentenced him to six years in a penal colony. Miftakhov denied the accusation and pleaded not guilty. In March of this year, the sentence was extended until 2028.

Credible reports indicate that Miftakhov has been subjected to considerable mistreatment while incarcerated. The Public Monitoring Commission, an independent Russian watchdog organization

overseeing prisons, determined that after his arrest Miftakhov's body bore the signs of torture, apparently inflicted by the interrogators attempting to extract a false confession.

The case of **Azat Miftakhov** has led to a substantial response across the globe by the mathematics community. Mathematicians are professionals dedicated to the freedom of expression and to the advancing mathematical research and education. We are connected as a diverse global community through our publications, meetings, and conferences. Indeed, Azat's field of mathematics--probability theory and stochastic processes--is close enough to my own that, under normal circumstances, I am likely to hear one of his conference presentations. His circumstance has drawn attention from the American Mathematical Society, Société Mathématique de France, Unione Matematica Italiana, the Brazilian Mathematical Society, and the London Mathematical Society. In June 2021, Harvard University held Azat Miftakhov Day, and in July 2022, the Australian Mathematical Society hosted conference in Miftakhov's honor.

In the toughest times in the relationship between Russia and the United States, the bringing together of the academic research communities was an opening that heralded better days. I remember the 1975 Handshake in Space and, later, the coming together of the scholars in probability theory across North America, Europe (East and West), and Russia. It was an exciting time with a gushing forward of the ideas that formerly divided mathematics communities had created. The ensuing confluence certainly ushered in the modern approaches to my research field.

It is our wish that we can begin to reconstruct our relationship with Russians through a return to sharing our intellectual achievements. The release of Azat Miftakhov would be an important gesture in that direction.

Respectfully yours,



Joseph C. Watkins, Chair
Committee on the Human Rights of Mathematicians
American Mathematical Society

Cc:

Senator Christopher Coon, Senator Thom Tillis, co-chairs, Senate Human Rights Caucus
James P. McGovern, Chris Smith, co-chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/russia/>

<http://www.ams.org/images/PipherLtr.Miftakhov01-05-21.pdf>

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<https://www.math.harvard.edu/event/the-azat-miftakhov-day/>

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