

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

In late May, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution (S.Res. 632) we authored calling for the immediate release of Russian opposition leader Vladimir Kara-Murza, who has been unjustly jailed since April 11. Mr. Kara-Murza is a Russian patriot who has worked tirelessly for decades to advance the cause of freedom, democracy, and human rights for the Russian people. He, along with his murdered Russian opposition colleague Boris Nemtsov, was a key voice in advocating for the Sergei Magnitsky Act (P.L. 112-208), which provided for sanctions against Russian human rights violators. For his efforts and, most recently, peaceful criticisms of the Russian war in Ukraine, Mr. Kara-Murza has faced multiple poisoning attempts and up to 15 years in jail. As such, we request the timely imposition of Magnitsky Act-related sanctions against all Russian officials responsible for his poisoning as well as his current arrest, jailing, and prosecution.

In May 2015 and again in February 2017, Mr. Kara-Murza fell ill with symptoms consistent with poisoning. During the second attempt, he was placed into a medically induced coma in the hopes of helping save his life. He survived both attempts, but faced a long and slow recovery. Independent investigations by Bellingcat, the Insider, and Der Spiegel found that the same unit of the Russian Federal Security Service implicated in the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny had also “systematically tailed Vladimir Kara-Murza before both his first and second medical emergencies¹.”

In February, shortly after Russian dictator Vladimir Putin launched a military operation to further his attempted invasion of Ukraine, he signed a law criminalizing criticisms or truthful statements about the conflict, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Nonetheless, thousands of Russians have criticized the disastrous war, many ultimately facing arrest or government harassment. On April 11, five police officers arrested Mr. Kara-Murza in front of his Moscow home and denied his right to an attorney, and the following day he was spuriously sentenced to 15 days in prison for disobeying a police order. On April 22, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation charged him with violating the prohibition on statements condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. If convicted, he faces up to 15 years of detention in a penitentiary system that human rights groups have criticized for widespread torture, ill-treatment, and suspicious or deliberate deaths of prisoners. Those Russian police, intelligence, security, court, and top-level government officials responsible for his absurd and cowardly detention also

¹ <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/02/11/vladimir-kara-murza-tailed-by-members-of-fsb-squad-prior-to-suspected-poisonings/>

deserve immediate assessment for sanctioning under the Magnitsky Act for which Mr. Kara-Murza so bravely advocated.

Recently, Mr. Kara-Murza wrote to us from his Russian gulag, quoting Canadian human rights advocate and former justice minister Irwin Cotler who once wrote that "the worst nightmare for a political prisoner is to be forgotten." And yet, amid his detention and separation from his family, he remained optimistic, noting, "Despite everything, I know that one day Russia will be free." We applaud his love of country and hope for a better future for the Russian people. We urge the administration to make sure those cowards trying to quash his efforts are fully sanctioned under the Magnitsky Act.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator