



CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

Acceptance Speech

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Thank you very much for this honor. I am most grateful for this recognition of my modest work.

What does civil courage mean in my country? Where is my country now and where is it going?

Once again, the gulag has become part of the reality of Russia. Political prisoners are now being held in the same camps where once so many Soviet dissidents died. Now the new prisoners are dying there too.

Russia announced a moratorium on capital punishment, but the conditions in these camps are so harsh that once more they are the equivalent of capital punishment.

Prisoners are being tortured by the police controlled by the prosecutors, and also by the FSB - the new name for the KGB. In recent months I have investigated a number of such cases.

What is the purpose of these tortures?

Citizens are being held and tortured if they are found to be in permanent opposition to the regime. Officially, however, all this is explained as fighting terrorism. So to justify the government's acts, people with no terrorist connections are classified as suspected terrorists. This is to show that Russia is leading the fight against terrorism.

Only persons known in the West, or with support from the West are likely to be released, since the Kremlin is reluctant to offend the western democracies.

The presidents and prime ministers of western countries are not going to examine and worry too much about how many of these terrorism cases are fake - the evidence tampered with, or obtained through torture.

I have investigated cases where under the most frightful tortures, resulting in the victims' being permanently mutilated or even crippled, confessions were extracted that could not possibly have been true, followed by frightfully long terms - 15 or 20 years - in Siberian camps where all communication with the prisoners are forbidden. The Red Cross is not admitted.

Frequently, there is a tacit order in force never to release these prisoners.

One prisoner was told, "Winter is coming. Then you will kick the bucket, that's what the commandant says. The deputy commandant has said that he's not going to see you again."

Given what I do, it is in fact a miracle that I am alive today, and that I am not in prison. For that, and for the Civil Courage Prize, which will help me stay free, I am deeply, deeply grateful.