

While everyone watches the World Cup, a political prisoner starves in Russia

Opinion

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Posted on : 2018/7/8 22:38:55

UBO: The editorial below appeared in the Washington Post. The situation to which it refers is just one of the many reasons that President Donald Trump should, rather than his constant kissing-up to Putin, develop the intestinal fortitude to raise the issue in the strongest possible terms. Based on our opinion on what is about to happen, we believe it would be appropriate to move the Trump-Putin summit to Munich, the scene of the last previous major sell-out by a Western leader to a dictator. Photo: Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov gestures inside a defendants' cage as he attends a court hearing in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, in 2015. (Sergey Pivovarov/Reuters)

By The Washington Post [Editorial Board](#), July 6, 2018 FOR THE past three weeks, people from all over the world have watched, enthralled, as the biggest names in international soccer have taken to the field for the World Cup in Russia. But amid the moments of athletic brilliance are powerful reminders of Russian President Vladimir Putin's repressive regime. Last week, campaigners staged a quiet protest on Moscow's popular Nikolskaya Street, erecting a [human-size](#) statue of the World Cup trophy adorned with barbed wire in reference to the country's many political prisoners. Days later, a group of young activists [demonstrated](#) outside the St. Petersburg stadium as Sweden took on Switzerland. Both protests called for the release of one prisoner in particular: Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker who has been imprisoned since 2014 and on hunger strike since mid-May. Mr. Sentsov, an activist and director based in Crimea, was vocally opposed to Russia's annexation of his homeland. He resisted the occupation and [worked](#) with protesters to deliver supplies to Ukrainian soldiers trapped in Crimean bases. Soon after, he was arrested by Russian security forces on flimsy terrorism charges. The authorities claim he set fire to the door of a Russian political party and planned to blow up a statue of Vladimir Lenin. Mr. Sentsov has denied any wrongdoing and has said that he was beaten and tortured in prison; the main witness in the case retracted his testimony after similar reports of coercion. Though human rights groups have called his trial ["fatally flawed"](#), Mr. Sentsov was sentenced to 20 years in prison and transported to a Siberian penal colony more than [3,000 miles](#) from Crimea. Mr. Sentsov's case garnered international attention when he embarked on his hunger strike to demand the release of 64 Ukrainian political prisoners held by Russia. (He did not include himself in this list.) The European Parliament [passed a resolution](#) calling for his release, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron both [reportedly raised](#) the issue in talks with Mr. Putin. The State Department also [called](#) for his release, though this was undermined by [speculation](#) that President Trump could recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea when he meets Mr. Putin on July 16. [[hellip;\]](#) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinion ... ml?utm_term=.abab87b094b7