

Speech from Marharyta Shabanova, wife of Dmytro Shabanov.

Side Event on the Situation of the Three Detained OSCE Officials held in Captivity

The Hague

Sunday, 5 July 13:00 –14:30

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to stand before you - before the very people who, in your own countries, have the power to question, to legislate, and to demand accountability from your governments.

I am not a diplomat. I am not a politician. I am a wife. And for years now, I have been waiting.

My husband, my Dima - was unlawfully detained on April 15, 2022 while carrying out his duties for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in Luhansk (non-government-controlled territory of Ukraine). He was held incommunicado for three months, and on September 19, 2022, he and his OSCE colleague Maksym Petrov, were both sentenced by the “Supreme Court” of the unrecognized Luhansk People’s Republic to 13 years in prison, for crimes of “high treason”. There was no legal process, no documentation of what these ‘treasonous’ crimes were, no transparency to the court proceedings, and the sentencing was televised only as a media presentation, as a fait accompli....

After my husband’s detention in April 2022, and before his sentencing 5 months later in September, the first news I had of my Dima was a video circulated by the Russian Federation media in July 2022. I saw my husband in a horrible condition, and I can only try to express to you what I felt at that moment. I was shocked about how my beloved Dima looked – he appeared emaciated, with hollow cheeks, he had lost a lot of weight, he had unhealthy skin, and his t-shirt was torn. Two more months after that video my Dima sentenced for crime that was fabricated by an unrecognized court, and I as his wife could only watch in horror and fear of what was to come next.

Then in January 2025, my husband's sentence was aligned to the Russian Federation's Criminal Code and what I learned later is that this sentence resulted in the deportation in March 2025 of my husband from a colony in Vakhrushevo (Luhansk) to a penal colony with an even stricter regime in Omsk, within the Russian Federation territory of Siberia.

Given the conditions my Dima endured while he was incommunicado and then what I learned from witnesses who were detained in the same cells as he was during the trial period in the Luhansk region – the isolation, harsh treatment, psychological pressure,

and what he had to survive during that period – it is difficult for me to believe that his health could remain intact. Since 2022 until now it has been a struggle to obtain confirmed information about his state of physical or mental health, or even of his whereabouts, and every day I pray that worse news does not arrive.

My Dima is Ukrainian. He is one of the national staff who served the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. People often forget that field missions like this one could not function, could not see, could not report, without people like him. National staff were the backbone of that mission. When my Dima joined the SMM as a driver back in 2016, he did so with complete faith in the OSCE and its mandate, and he believed that this organization stood for something larger than any single state's interest.

With dedication, loyalty and hard work, my Dima continued his work as a security assistant in the Luhansk region fully aligned with the principles of the OSCE. Nothing more, nothing less. I can say this not only for my husband, but also on behalf of the other two families with detained family: Petrov and Golda, who share this nightmare. Our loved ones performed their duties professionally, faithfully, and lawfully. They were doing their jobs. They were not committing crimes. And they were certainly not committing "high treason" or "espionage."

My Dima and his colleagues, Maksym (Petrov) and Vadym (Golda), should never have been detained. They should never have been jailed. They should never have been stolen from their families for years of their lives and of ours.

For families like mine, this is not an abstract issue debated in conference rooms. It is a daily reality of pain, of uncertainty, of empty chairs at the table. The detention of my Dima, and of his colleagues Maksym and Vadym, is a violation of international law. It is a violation of human dignity. And it is a violation of the very values that the OSCE was created to uphold by all fifty-seven participating States. And it has been ongoing for over 4 years. Please – I ask you to imagine your husband, brother, or son missing from your life for over 4 years...Of over 4 years of daily fear, and daily prayers - that he is alive, and that he will soon come home...

We are indeed grateful for the efforts already made by the OSCE Secretary General, by Senator Boris Dittrich and participating States that have repeated their calls for unconditional release. These statements matter. But I ask you honestly, as I ask myself every single day: what has truly been done to bring them home? What tools remain unused, and why? Where are the legal protections that are supposed to shield international staff from arbitrary detention, coercion, and harm? Because if staff of an international organization can be seized, abused, and held for years in violation of international law without consequence then something is not simply bent. It is broken.

And this is precisely where you come in. You are not bound by the slow choreography of inter-state diplomacy alone. You carry mandates from your own citizens. You can raise this case on the floor of your national parliament. You can put it directly to your foreign ministers, your prime ministers, your heads of state. You can use parliamentary diplomacy - bilateral contacts, parliamentary friendship groups, resolutions of this very Assembly - to keep this case visible, to keep it uncomfortable, to keep it impossible to quietly set aside. History has shown that political prisoners are rarely freed by silence. They are freed when enough voices, in enough parliaments, in enough languages, refuse to let their names be forgotten.

To my fellow Ukrainians here today - you understand this pain in a way that needs no translation. And to colleagues from every other delegation in this room - I ask you to understand that this is not only a Ukrainian story. It is a story about whether the international system you represent can still protect the people who serve it. Today it is my Dima's name. Tomorrow it could be the name of a national staff member serving on any mission, in any country, under any flag of this Organization.

So as a wife waiting for her husband, but also as someone who still believes that justice is possible, I want to close with three requests to every parliamentarian in this room:

First, do not let my Dima and his colleagues disappear into silence. Speak their names in your parliaments, in your committees, in your meetings with Russian counterparts where such channels still exist.

Second, stand with us in restoring the basic human rights of our loved ones - the right to liberty, to due process, to be treated as the civilians and professionals they are.

Third, please use every diplomatic, political, and legal tool available to you - and do not stop using them until justice is achieved. Please raise this to all who have power, because YOU speak for the powerless.

The release of my Dima and his colleagues from this wrongful detention is not a symbolic gesture. It is about saving lives that hang in the balance with every day that passes. Bringing them home is not someday's task - it is an urgent need, today, and every day until it happens.

I came here to ask for your voice. I hope I can count on it.

Thank you for your attention.