Director of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Altai krai
Gerasimov Sergei Yermagenovich
Lenina prospekt
147-B, Barnaul
Altai krai, 656011

**RUSSLAND**

Dear Director

I am writing to you in regards to Maria Ponomarenko, a journalist and an activist from Barnaul in Western Siberia. On April 23, 2022, she was detained for sharing a post on her Telegram channel about the bombing of the Mariupol theater in Ukraine. It included a video from the theater taken before the attack and a short comment condemning the deaths of civilians. On February 15, 2023, Maria Ponomarenko was sentenced to six years in prison followed by a five-year ban on working as a journalist. In April 2024, Maria Ponomarenko was sent to a punishment cell for the fourth time. During this time, she spent 77 days in solitary confinement, longer than any female political prisoner in Russia had ever spent before.

It should be noted that as part of the investigation, she was taken to a psychiatric hospital for an examination. There she was forcibly injected with unknown drugs and subjected to brutal treatment. During her imprisonment her mental health deteriorated and continues to do so.

The very nature of her profession is to freely and openly speak about current affairs to the general public and she thereby acted within the parameters of not only her human rights to freedom of speech and expression but her duty as a journalist and an activist. In those respects, her actions are not criminal and thereby her release should be immediate and unconditional. I kindly urge you to ensure that she is protected against any ill-treatment as per international law and standards in any prison institution, as well as while in transit between them. Moreover all persons suspected of being responsible for the ill-treatment of Maria Ponomarenko must be brought to justice in a fair trial in accordance with international law.

Please address these injustices as it is within your power and role to oversee the penitentiary system and its operations.

Sincerely