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LUMINATO

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Luminato and the Toronto International Film Festival in partnership with Belarus Free Theatre issue a statement on the illegal incarceration of Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov

The organizations join a growing chorus of international voices calling upon Russian authorities to release Sentsov immediately and urging the Canadian government to speak out against the illegal detention of Sentsov and 70 additional Ukrainian political prisoners

Today, Sentsov is on day 34 of his hunger strike

#FreeSentsov

Toronto, ON – [Luminato](#) and the [Toronto International Film Festival](#) issue a joint statement today in partnership with the co-founder of [Belarus Free Theatre](#) **Natalia Kaliada** about the illegal detention of Ukrainian filmmaker [Oleg Sentsov](#) who is now on day 34 of a hunger strike. Sentsov has made it clear that the only way to end his hunger strike is to secure “the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners that are currently present on the territory of the Russian Federation.”

A native of annexed Crimea, Sentsov has been incarcerated in northern Siberia since 2014 after being arrested on unsubstantiated terrorism charges and a spurious trial in which the main witness for the prosecution later recanted his testimony saying it was extracted by torture.

Statement from Luminato & the Toronto International Film Festival:

“Today two of the country’s leading arts organizations join the growing calls for Russian authorities to release Oleg Sentsov and all other Ukrainian political prisoners currently detained. As organizations that vehemently believe in the right, value and necessity of artistic and political expression, Sentsov and other political prisoners have been denied their basic human rights and their detention is a serious violation of international law. As the world’s attention turns to Russia for the World Cup, we urge the international artistic community and Canadian government to join us in calling for the immediate release of Mr. Sentsov and 70 additional Ukrainian political prisoners.”

Piers Handling, CEO, Toronto International Film Festival
Josephine Ridge, Artistic Director, Luminato
Anthony Sargent CBE, CEO, Luminato

The joint statement from Luminato and the Toronto International Film Festival follows a recent meeting between Belarus Free Theatre co-founder Natalia Kaliada and Sentsov’s sister in Ukraine. Kaliada comments:

“We already knew that Oleg’s situation was dire but after meeting with his sister Natasha, it’s clear that the time for ‘just words’ has passed. What we need now are urgent and immediate actions to ensure that our colleague and fellow activist Oleg Sentsov is released. In addition to Oleg, the Russian government, led by Vladimir Putin, currently have 70 Ukrainian political prisoners detained in prisons around Russia. Having experienced living through a dictatorship in Belarus and having first-hand knowledge of the systemic oppression of the Russian government, we believe these prisoners are kept in inhumane conditions. We urge world leaders to take action and stand up against the gross breaches of international human rights laws and to make sure that Oleg Sentsov and all political prisoners are released. This is not the time for festivities and comradeship at the World Cup in Russia. It’s a time to leverage political pressure. It’s a time for moral politicians to speak up to save human lives in Russia. All productions of Burning Doors at Luminato are dedicated to Oleg and his fellow citizens who are unlawfully imprisoned in Russia.”

Sentsov’s story is told in Belarus Free Theatre’s work [Burning Doors](#). The production will be in Toronto next week as part of Luminato. *Burning Doors* documents the experiences of three artists persecuted by their governments for their artistic expression and activism: **Maria Alyokhina** from Pussy Riot (who portrays herself in the play), Russian performance artist **Petr Pavlensky**, and **Sentsov**. Both Natalia Kaliada and Maria Alyokhina will be in Toronto as of 18 June 2018.

On Thursday, the European parliament **urged Russia to release Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov alongside 70 other Ukrainian political prisoners being detained by the country.**

The parliamentary institution passed a resolution demanding Russian authorities to release Oleg Sentsov “immediately and unconditionally, as well as all other illegally detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and on the Crimean Peninsula.”

These statements join ongoing calls to action, led by PEN International, for Sentsov’s release and encouraging the public to send appeals to Russian authorities, local Ministries of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic representatives in Russia, and to share information about Sentsov and campaigning activities via social media.

**Sign the Change.org petition here: <https://www.change.org/p/freesentsov>
#FREESENTSOV**

For more information or interview requests:

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-ENDS-

From PEN International regarding Oleg Sentsov:

Best known for his 2011 film *Gamer*, Ukrainian filmmaker and writer Oleg Sentsov has been on a hunger strike since 14 May 2018. In a [statement](#) shared by his lawyer, Oleg Sentsov declares an “indefinite hunger strike” and that “the sole condition for its cessation is the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners located in the territory of the Russian Federation”.

Oleg Sentsov took part in the EuroMaidan demonstrations that toppled former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014. He helped deliver food to Ukrainian soldiers following Russia’s

occupation and illegal ‘annexation’ of Crimea in February – March 2014. He says he was arrested by the Russian security services at his apartment in Crimea on 10 May 2014. He reports being subjected to a brutal three-hour ordeal involving beatings, suffocation and threats of sexual assault.

His arrest was officially recorded on 11 May 2014 on the grounds of ‘suspicion of plotting terrorist acts’ and membership of a terrorist group (the Ukrainian right-wing group *Pravyi Sektor*, Right Sector). He was taken to Russia on 23 May 2014 where he spent over a year in pre-trial detention. He was eventually charged with the establishment of a terrorist group, politically-motivated arson and conspiring to blow up a statue of Lenin, all of which he denied.

Following a trial widely condemned outside of Russia, in which a key prosecution witness retracted his statement, saying it had been extracted under torture, Oleg Sentsov was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years in prison by the military court of Rostov-on-Don on 20 August 2015. His sentence was upheld on appeal on 24 November 2015. In October 2016, the Russian authorities denied a request for extradition to Ukraine on the grounds that he had become a Russian citizen following Russia’s occupation and ‘annexation’ of Crimea. He is currently being held in the prison colony of Labytnangi in Siberia.

PEN International denounces serious flaws in judicial proceedings against Oleg Sentsov, including his lengthy pre-trial detention, the failure to investigate his allegations of torture as well as the fact that he was tried by a Russian military court and is now being held in Russia. Under international law, Crimea constitutes occupied territory and as the occupying power, Russia is obliged not to transfer civilian prisoners out of the territory. Trying civilians in military courts also violates international human rights norms.

In April 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concerns at “allegations that Oleg Sentsov has been deprived against his will of his Ukrainian nationality, tried in Moscow as a citizen of the Russian Federation and subject to legal proceedings that fail to meet the requirements of Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”. It called on the Russian authorities to investigate all allegations of serious human rights violations and to ensure that appropriate and transparent procedures are in place for Crimean residents to revisit their decision concerning their nationality.

Oleg Sentsov is the winner of the 2017 PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award.

About Luminato

Luminato is Toronto’s international arts festival dedicated to performance, media and visual arts, and programming that cuts across traditional artform boundaries. Luminato works closely with Canadian artists to support the development and creation of distinctive new work as well as presenting today’s most exciting artists from around the world. The 2018 festival runs June 6 to 24 and extends from its previous 10 days to 19, the intended festival length for future years.

Led by CEO Anthony Sargent CBE and Artistic Director Josephine Ridge, Luminato is a charitable, not-for-profit, globally connected cultural organization proudly based in Toronto. www.luminato.com

Luminato is generously supported by:

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TIFF is a charitable cultural organization whose mission is to transform the way people see the world through film. An international leader in film culture, TIFF projects include the annual Toronto International Film Festival in September; TIFF Bell Lightbox, which features five cinemas, major exhibitions, and learning and entertainment facilities; and innovative national distribution program Film Circuit. The organization generates an annual economic impact of \$189 million CAD. TIFF Bell Lightbox is generously supported by contributors including Founding Sponsor Bell, the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the City of Toronto, the Reitman family (Ivan Reitman, Agi Mandel and Susan Michaels), The Daniels Corporation and RBC. For more information, visit tiff.net.

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