

## **Ukrainian filmmaker sentenced to 20 years by Russian court**

26/08/2015 13:21 by admin

**Rostov-on-don, Russia:** A Russian military court convicted a prominent Ukrainian filmmaker on Tuesday of conspiring to commit terror attacks and sentenced him to 20 years in prison in what critics called a politically motivated show trial.

The court in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don said Oleg Sentsov had set up a terror cell in the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed last year, and was plotting attacks. He will serve time in a maximum-security prison.

Such lengthy prison sentences are rare in Russia even for politically tainted trials.

The 39-year-old Crimean native was tried along with Crimean activist Alexander Kolchenko, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison. As the judge wrapped up the session, the two men smiled and began to sing the Ukrainian national anthem.

"Glory to Ukraine," Sentsov said at the end, to which someone in the courtroom gave the traditional response: "Glory to the heroes."

Sentsov was a vocal opponent of Russia's 2014 annexation of the Black Sea peninsula. Critics have dismissed his prosecution by Russia as retaliation for his pro-Ukrainian position.

"The whole trial was designed to send a message. It played into Russia's propaganda war against Ukraine and was redolent of Stalinist-era show trials of dissidents," said Heather McGill of Amnesty International.

The international rights group, whose representatives observed the trial, said it was "rife with irregularities, including shocking revelations about the use of torture and other ill treatment to extract testimony."

Russian prosecutors claimed both men were plotting to blow up a Lenin monument and were behind attempts to burn down the offices of two Russia-related organizations.

Sentsov, who unlike most Crimean residents didn't apply for Russian citizenship after the annexation, was grabbed on a street in Crimea's capital in May 2014 by Russian security officers and resurfaced days later in custody in Moscow. Sentsov had pleaded not guilty and insisted that a Russian court had no jurisdiction in his case.

In his closing arguments last week, Sentsov said he believes there are Russians who oppose the Kremlin but are afraid to speak out. He said many Ukrainians felt the same way before joining the protests that led to the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian president in early 2014.

"The only thing I can wish this third, informed part of the Russian population: Learn not to be afraid," he said.

His sister said the verdict was exactly what defense lawyers expected.

"The investigators said a year ago that Oleg would get exactly 20 years and they kept their promise, despite our battle," Natalia Kaplan told journalists. She said they would appeal.

Dozens of prominent Russian filmmakers have petitioned the Kremlin to release Sentsov, including Andrei Zvyagintsev, whose 2014 film "Leviathan" won a Golden Globe.

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on his Facebook page sent a message of support for Sentsov.

"Hang in there, Oleg," he wrote. "A time will come when those who set this trial for you will land in the dock."

The United States condemned the sentences.

"This is a clear miscarriage of justice," State Department spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

"Both Ukrainians were taken hostage on Ukrainian territory, transported to and imprisoned in Russia, and had Russian citizenship imposed on them against their wills. They have reported abuses by Russian authorities who also restricted their access to lawyers, family, and others while in jail for more than a year."

"Mr. Sentsov and Mr. Kolchenko were targeted by authorities because of their opposition to Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea," he added.

Britain also called the trial politically motivated. British Minister for Europe David Lidington said the charges were "disproportionate" and voiced concern that the two men did not have access to a fair trial.

- AP