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|  | **گروه پزشکان و کادر پزشکی مدافع حقوق بشر در ایران- اتریش**  Medical Professionals for Human Rights in Iran – Austria |  |
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**Vienna, 02.18.2024**

**Russia's most prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny dies in prison**

The circumstances of the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny must be independently investigated.

Like many prominent Kremlin critics before him, Alexei Navalny paid for his fearless fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin with his life. The country's most famous political prisoner died on Friday, 16 February, at the age of 47 in the notorious IK-3 penal colony in northern Siberia. The exact cause of death is still unknown, and an independent investigation into his death is unlikely.

Navalny, who was the target of a poison attack in 2020, was one of the strongest critics of the Putin regime. He served years of imprisonment in various penal colonies. He was convicted of extremism, among other things. In the past, he had publicised cases of corruption in Russia and organised demonstrations against Putin. His political movement was banned. His closest associates were imprisoned or left Russia. He himself returned to Russia voluntarily after receiving medical treatment in Berlin and was imprisoned again.

Relatives have been warning for months that Navalny's health is deteriorating due to the harsh prison conditions. Images of court hearings in which he took part via video from prison showed him looking severely weakened in recent months. Despite his health problems, he has been denied meaningful medical treatment. Human rights activists accuse the Russian regime of murder. About 400 people have been arrested during mourning ceremonies throughout the country, and even the laying of flowers in his memory has been banned. Russia's power machinery has repeatedly used violence against dissidents. Protests have not been allowed in the country for years.

Governments and human rights groups around the world are shocked by Navalny's death and emphasise the responsibility of Russia's President Putin and his government. The fact that the regime critic died suddenly and mysteriously shortly after appearing in court bears similarities to the deaths of Iranian prisoners last year. Young people there also allegedly committed suicide after being released from prison, which indicates the abuse of psychotropic drugs in prison or the deliberate use of drugs. Protests have also been banned in Iran for years and mourning rallies are suppressed.

These similarities are not only a sign of Iran's political and economic rapprochement with Russia under Putin's rule, but also the human rights violations in prisons show the convergence between these violent regimes in their methods of suppressing their opponents.

As human rights groups, we call for an immediate independent investigation of the cause of Alexei Navalny's death.

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