

Australian novelist, photographers and a human rights activist demand immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk

Our reporters
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The international campaign for the immediate release of 27-year-old Bogdan Syrotiuk—a socialist and internationalist opponent of both the Zelensky and Putin regimes—and the dropping of all charges continues to win strong support in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

The latest statements are from Australian novelist Jock Serong, documentary photographers Jack Picone and John Hulme, and Bronwyn Mewett, a founding member of the Fair Go For David support group, which fought for the release of Australian citizen David Hicks from the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp.

Hulme, a UK-born, Thailand-based photographer, has spent decades documenting social issues in Europe, Thailand, Burma, India, Bangladesh and Japan, focusing in particular on the plight of so-called “illegal migrants” and other brutally exploited workers. His photographs have been widely published and exhibited.

Hulme made the following call for Syrotiuk’s immediate release:

“I’m writing to express my strong condemnation of the sentencing of Bogdan Syrotiuk on trumped-up charges of ‘high treason’ and to demand the quashing of his 15 years’ jail sentence and his immediate release.

“Bogdan has been convicted for publishing anti-war articles on the *World Socialist Web Site* which called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers to end the war—articles which opposed the Putin regime’s invasion and the US-NATO proxy war—and for his writings exposing Zelensky’s glorification of Stepan Bandera, the Nazi collaborator in whose name Zelensky has declared a national holiday.

“The Zelensky regime, known for its brutal repression of left-wing movements and all those

opposing war, sees Bogdan as an existential threat and someone it is determined to silence. The prosecution has presented no evidence showing espionage or collaboration with a foreign enemy. The reality is that Bogdan has been sentenced to 15 years because Ukrainian authorities know that his writings will resonate with workers on both sides of the conflict.

“Bogdan’s imprisonment is a warning to the international working class and a clear indication that the expansion of imperialist wars will see an escalation of the attacks on democratic rights, including making free speech a crime.

“The international campaign to demand Bogdan’s immediate release must be urgently intensified and taken forward by artists, writers, photographers, filmmakers and workers of every type. The fight for freedom for Bogdan Syrotiuk is inseparable from the fight against imperialist war and authoritarian rule everywhere.”

Australian writer Jock Serong is an established author with seven novels to his name. He is one of 200 authors and academics who called for a boycott of the Bendigo Writers Festival last year in protest over the last-minute barring of speakers from discussing Israel’s Gaza genocide.

He sent the following statement:

“The prosecution and imprisonment of Bogdan Syrotiuk follows an emerging practice internationally whereby media coverage of active wars is controlled by the warring parties by selectively taking out journalists to silence them. This is as true of Israel’s atrocities in Gaza as it is of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“Any prosecution of a journalist, and especially one

who seeks to tell the truth about the real situation in Ukraine, is a blow to press freedom everywhere, and in the aggregate such attacks lessen the quality of coverage we all receive. How can we form moral positions about faraway wars when we are receiving partial versions of the truth about them?

“Bogdan Syrotyuk appears to have been jailed for his thoughts and his words. He deserves due process, and the freedom to continue his important work.”

Bronwyn Mewett was involved in the protracted campaign for the release of David Hicks. He was captured in Afghanistan in late 2001 and soon after “rendered” (illegally transferred) to Guantanamo Bay where he was held until 2007. After protests and legal action, he was finally transferred to an Australian high-security prison in May 2007 and released in late December that year.

Mewett sent the following letter to Ukrainian authorities:

“Dear government members and court judges,

“Last August 10, the sentencing of a socialist, Bogdan Syrotyuk, to 15 years in prison for alleged high treason in Ukraine was made public. Syrotyuk called for Russian and Ukrainian workers to unite against the war, writing that ‘Russian and Ukrainian workers have no reason to kill each other,’ and proposing that they unite against the war.

“No evidence of sabotage or direct military collaboration was presented at the trial. This was a political trial.

“Is Ukraine a country where democratic rights exist, or isn’t it? Do Ukrainian citizens have a right to express an honest opinion, or must they remain silent?

“Syrotyuk spoke and wrote exhorting peace and the unity of workers across borders. There was no reason for his words to be misinterpreted as treason. This seems to be a case of denial of the freedom of speech and of the press.

“I demand that the Ukrainian authorities release this man from prison and quash his sentence immediately. It is a travesty of justice that this man has already been imprisoned for two years. I also demand that you provide him with impartial legal assistance with a lawyer of his choosing, as well as appropriate medical

assistance immediately. These are basic human rights. I look forward to your reply.”

Australian documentary photographer Jack Picone, currently a media studies lecturer at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand, has reported on wars in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, including the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and is the recipient of a number of prestigious international photography awards.

He sent the following comment:

“History is littered with a plethora of men who start homicidal wars. In far fewer numbers, history is peppered with courageous men who stand up to the behemoth of war and say ‘No!’ Bogdan Syrotyuk is such a man. Bogdan Syrotyuk is a man of peace. The fictitious crime of treason and its fifteen-year sentence are simply spurious.

“While Ukraine’s Zelensky government claims to be a democracy, even under wartime martial law, it is not democratic to incarcerate a man for free speech that is rooted in peace. Isn’t peace what the world needs now more than ever before? Release Bogdan Syrotyuk now.”

The World Socialist Web Site urges its readers to add their names to the petition for Bogdan’s freedom. Write to the Pervomaisk City District Court at inbox@pm.mk.court.gov.ua and the Nikolaev Court of Appeal at inbox@mka.court.gov.ua, with a copy to freebogdan@wsws.org, demanding that the sentence be thrown out and Bogdan be freed at once.



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