

## **JUSTICE POUR TOUS INTERNATIONALE**

### **Urges Immediate Release of Mr. Aivo Peterson and Decisive Action Against Political Persecution and Abuse of State Security Legislation in Estonia**

#### **PRESS RELEASE**

*Geneva, 31 July 2024* – Justice pour Tous Internationale (JPTi) has submitted a communication to six Special Procedures mandate holders of the UN Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk, and the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Estonia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Mrs. Riia Salsa-Audiffren. This communication calls for immediate action to halt the political persecution and abuse of state security legislation against Mr. Aivo Peterson, a prominent political activist in Estonia, for his non-violent activities.

In September 2023, the Estonian State Prosecutor's Office charged Aivo Peterson and Dmitri Rootsî with treason, citing their involvement in non-violent actions against the Estonian state, while Russian citizen Andrey Andronov faced similar charges. The charges allege that between October 2022 and 10 March 2023, Peterson and Rootsî, under instructions from the Russian Federation, assisted Russia in non-violent activities against Estonia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The prosecution claims they aimed to create a political association in Estonia that supports Russian foreign policy narratives, thus threatening Estonia's constitutional order and influencing its domestic and foreign policy.

Prior to his arrest and charges, Mr. Aivo Peterson had been subjected to severe human rights violations due to his peaceful political activities and expressions. The Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO) has systematically targeted Mr. Peterson, using legal instruments intended to protect national security to suppress political dissent and non-violent activism. These actions include alleged arbitrary detention, denial of due process, and suppression of his fundamental rights to freedom of expression and association.

The complaint, supported by a detailed legal analysis from Mr. Douwe Korff, Emeritus Professor of International Law, highlights the misuse of state security legislation by the Estonian authorities. Professor Korff's findings indicate that the charges against Mr. Peterson lack credible evidence and appear to be driven by his political dissent and advocacy for peace. The legal instruments employed against Mr. Peterson effectively transform into Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), reportedly aimed at stifling his political influence and intimidating his supporters.

Professor Korff emphasizes that the charges against Mr. Peterson are a manifestation of Europe's Cold War-like attempts to suppress media perceived as spreading "pro-Russian propaganda." Korff argues that this case exemplifies the misuse of legal instruments to stifle non-violent political speech, likening it to McCarthyism. He warns that if the case against Peterson is not urgently halted, it could set a dangerous precedent for criminalizing dissent not only in Estonia but also across Europe. This concern is heightened by the fact that on 15 July 2024, Prime Minister Kaja Kallas resigned to become the EU's foreign policy chief. Kallas, who was appointed as a candidate for the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had led the Estonian government since early 2021, during which the persecution of Mr. Peterson took place.

Justice pour Tous Internationale is deeply concerned that central to Mr. Peterson's case is the violation of his right to freedom of expression and the government's attempts to silence his political dissent. According to our findings and the detailed legal assessment provided in the Opinion of Emeritus Professor Douwe Korff, the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO) has systematically utilized legal instruments to infringe upon fundamental freedoms of speech and public participation. KAPO's actions effectively transform these legal measures into SLAPPs, aimed at suppressing and stifling Mr. Aivo Peterson. This tactic not only seeks to neutralize Mr. Peterson's political influence but also serves to instill fear among members of his political movement and his sympathizers within the broader Estonian population.

Justice pour Tous Internationale considers that Estonia violated Articles 9, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, and 26 of the ICCPR, which guarantee the rights to liberty, personal security, a fair trial, privacy, freedom of opinion and expression, participation in public affairs, and equality before the law and protection against discrimination, respectively. This systemic persecution is a stark violation of the democratic principles and human rights standards that Estonia is obligated to uphold under international law, particularly violating Articles 2 and 4 of the ICCPR.

Justice pour Tous Internationale urges the UN to process this complaint expeditiously and issue a joint communication to the Estonian government to halt all suppressive actions against Mr. Peterson, ensuring that no further harm comes to him or his family while his case is being reviewed. Additionally, we seek to bring this complaint to the attention of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, requesting them to consider Mr. Peterson's case under its regular procedure and issue an opinion on the arbitrary nature of his detention and the violations of his rights.

The communication also highlights the critical need for the Estonian government to comply with its international human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights (EU Charter). Specific actions recommended include:

1. Immediate cessation of all suppressive actions against Mr. Peterson.
2. Immediate release and dropping of all charges against Mr. Peterson.

3. Ensuring a fair trial with full access to evidence and public hearings.
4. Rectifying procedural violations and preventing misuse of anti-state charges and abuse of state security legislation to suppress non-violent political opponents.
5. Implementing enhanced protections for political activists and human rights defenders.

The continued detention and prosecution of Mr. Peterson constitute severe violations of his fundamental freedoms and human rights and undermine democratic principles in Estonia. The Estonian authorities must halt these actions and uphold the rule of law.

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