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TITLE: The Magnitsky Human Rights Awards 2019 – Lyubov Sobol

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SPEAKER

VLADAMIR KARA-MURZA - V

LYUBOV SOBOL: L

NIKITA KULACHENKOV: N

V: Before I say anything else tonight I want to thank our host, Bill Browder not only for bringing all of us here together, but for leading this campaign for this past decade. I cannot think of a more fitting way to honour the legacy of someone who stood up for the rule of law than to create a lasting and universal recognition of accountability for human rights abuse and it's been the honour of my life to be a small part of this campaign. Thank you, Bill, for everything that you continue to do. The year was 1968 that August the Soviet Government decided that it has had enough with the Prague Spring, the dangerous experiment of liberalisation in the Eastern Bloc. As it launched full scale invasion of Czechoslovakia the Kremlin made sure to put up a show of support for sanctions. All across the USSR trade unions, workers collectives, professional associations; academic institutes held votes of approval. Soviet newspapers reported that support for the military action was unanimous and then something happened. One afternoon that August seven people came out onto Red Square in a silent demonstration of protest, the banner they brought with them read, "Za vashu i nashu svobodu", "For Your Freedom and Ours".

They weren't there even five minutes, they were beaten, arrested and herded away almost immediately, but what they did is remember to this day. A nation minus even one person is no longer an entire nation. Natalia Gorbanevskaya, a poet and one of the other seven demonstrators later said, "A nation minus me is not an entire nation." And so they could no longer say that there was nationwide approval for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Our country has had more than its fair share of tyranny and oppression, but in every era however difficult this task you would always find people in Russia hoarding to stand up for justice and truth. People like the Decembrist's, the leaders of the December Movement under the Tsars, people like Natalia Gorbanevskaya, Vladimir Bukovsky and other courageous dissidents in the Soviet Union. People like Sergei Magnitsky and Boris Nemtsov in our time. Our honorary tonight could if she chose have pursued a success career in academia, public administration or private business. The Putin regime is not a totalitarian State; it does not demand full and unquestioned obedience.

You can get on with your life as long as you don't question the foundations of the system, the corruption, the censorship, the abuse of power, as long as you pretend not to notice. Lyubov Sobol doesn't want to pretend, a gifted lawyer, top of her class at Moscow State University, a candidate for a comfortable job with a Western consulting firm, she chose instead to go work for Alexei Navalny's Anticorruption Foundation, with her work, with her advocacy, with her investigations she confronts the system on a daily basis be it by exposing the machinery of election fraud built up by the Moscow authorities or by challenging the corrupt interests of Yevgeny Prigozhn, once a convicted criminal who is now one of the most influential courtiers to Vladimir Putin running his proxy wars in the furthest corners of the world. She is our honorary tonight and the work of Lyubov Sobol among others that is inspiring young Russians to increasingly step forward and stand up against the system. No longer seven people as in August of 1968, but tens of thousands as we have seen on the streets of Moscow over this past summer and this if nothing else gives hope for a better future in my country.

It is my great honour tonight on behalf of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign to present the 2019 Outstanding Russian Opposition Activist Award to Lyubov Sobol of the Anticorruption Foundation. She could not be here tonight in person so she has recorded this video message.

L: Hello everyone, unfortunately I had no opportunity to attend this ceremony in person. It is my colleague, Nikita, is getting the award for me, but I decided to thank you for this award and for high recognition of my work in this video. For more than eight years I have been working in public organisations to fight corruption together with Alexei Navalny's team I invested in cases of corruption by talking to public officials on abuse of authority by Vladimir Putin and his inner circle. During this year I have been detained illegally, I have been searched repeatedly, my husband got attacked next to our house and he could have died if he hadn't got family medical care. One of the organisers of that attack was the closest Putin's associate, Yevgeny Prigozhin, he has in fact the licence to kill and to do any unlawful against the objectionable people. I keep working under pressure no matter what because I believe that we Russian citizens have the right to live in a country where living is best in the rule of law and not on the principles where there is respect for human right and freedom, where the State works for the people and not vice versa.

It's my great honour to get The Magnitsky Award for the person, which will killed for sick injustice in our country and those bandits who are looting the State assets. Going into opposition together through the process I chant, 'Russia will be free', with these words I want to finish my little speech, Russia will be free and happy, I believe in it as Sergei Magnitsky believed.

V: Accepting the award on behalf of Lyubov Sobol tonight will be her colleague at the Anticorruption Foundation, fellow anticorruption investigator, Nikita Kulachenkov.

N: Thank you. I agree with Lyubov what she says about the future of Russia, we all working in the Anticorruption Foundation thinks that our country will be free, but I just have two comments on this to what she said. Apart from participating in the rallies this summer and she tried also to run the elections to participate in the election, but was banned for that and started a hunger strike. You can see this video and she is recording lots of the videos because the YouTube is still more or less not controlled by the Russian State. So it is the channel of communicating with our supporters and general public and I remember the summer when the crew of the video team was saying that it's getting harder and harder to hide the results of her hunger strike because she is already on a hunger strike for two or three weeks as far as I remember and she still wanted to be presented properly as a young, beautiful woman, but it was a problem for the crew to hide this result. Also I opt in as a messenger here, but this is not the first time I am receiving the award on someone's behalf, several years ago I did that on behalf of Oleg Navalny who was in prison at that time, now he is released happily or finally.

So I am working for Alexie Navalny, his brother, Oleg and the Anticorruption Foundation for several years, many years already. And I remember back in five years ago, six year ago when Lyubov and the rest of our team are a bit younger and

Alexei always told us that almost all of you can be politicians, a self-sufficient politician just go ahead and this inspired us a lot as well as what Lyubov is doing with the Magnitsky sanctions inspiring people to fight for human rights and Alexei Navalny inspired us for being politicians and here is the results. Lyubov is now a self-sufficient politician getting this reward. So we really thank you and she says thank you for this.

END OF TRANSCRIPT