

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:  
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“The Long Arm of Injustice: Did a U.N. Commission Founded to  
Fight Corruption Help the Kremlin Destroy a Russian Family?”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), Co-Chairman;  
Representative Randy Hultgren (R-IL);  
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)**

**Participants:**

**Victoria Sandoval, Criminal and Human Rights Attorney Representing the  
Bitkov Family;  
Rolando Alvarado, Attorney Representing the Bitkov Family and Professor of  
Law and Founding Partner, Corpolegal;  
Bill Browder, Founding Director, Global Magnitsky Campaign for Justice**

**The Hearing Was Held From 9:20 a.m. To 11:00 a.m. in Room 2172, Rayburn  
House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Christopher Smith  
(R-NJ), Co-Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe,  
presiding**

**Date: Friday, April 27, 2018**

SMITH: The hearing will come to order, and good morning.

The Russian government regularly pursues its vendettas beyond its borders, harassing and even murdering Russian emigres abroad, people who are on Putin's circle's target list for various reasons. The poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in England is one of the most recent examples to reach the news.

The Kremlin's sadistic pursuit of the Bitkov family is, in its way, just as shocking as the cruel murder of Litvinenko and the attempted murders of the Skripals. The Bitkovs are still alive today, but they have been hounded for over a decade to the opposite ends of the world and beyond the limits of human endurance merely for resisting Putin's favorites who sought to take over their successful paper manufacturing company.

More shocking, the facts of the case strongly indicate – and we will hear testimony on this today – that the United Nations International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, became deeply involved in the Kremlin's persecution of the Bitkov family – indeed, that CICIG acted as the Kremlin's operational agent in brutalizing and tormenting the Bitkov family.

Congress has a special responsibility in this matter because the United States is one of the largest contributors to CICIG, to their budget. There has been little congressional oversight of CICIG. It is clearly time for that to change.

In the 1990s, Igor and Irina Bitkov built the North West Timber Company, acquiring and modernizing old factories to increase paper production. As their company grew, the Bitkovs took loans from several Russian state banks to finance further modernization. Their business prospered, grew to a value of hundreds of millions of dollars, and the family was approached by a powerful bank executive who sought to buy a majority share in the company at a significantly below-market rate. Other officials asked Irina to become politically involved in President Vladimir Putin's party. When the Bitkovs refused, things got very, very ugly.

Their 16-year-old daughter, Anastasia, was kidnapped for several days, drugged, and repeatedly raped. Her parents ransomed her, paying the money to policemen who said that they were go-betweens to the kidnappers. Then the banks suddenly called in the loans, even though the Bitkovs had excellent credit. The family was threatened with imprisonment and death.

Fearing for their lives, the family fled Russia. They found what they thought was legal refuge in Guatemala with the help of a Guatemalan law firm. They acquired Guatemalan passports, bought a house – bought a house, learned Spanish, and gave birth to their second child, Vladimir. But the Kremlin caught up with them, and VTB Bank – one of Russia's biggest state-controlled banks, often referred to as Putin's piggybank – filed a complaint against them in Guatemala alleging use of false identification documents. While we don't know exactly what transpired internally to CICIG and the Guatemalan state agencies that work with them, it appears to have been taken up by the Guatemalan state and CICIG. In any case, the Bitkovs suddenly found themselves catapulted into what has become for them a horror that is without end.

On January 15th, 2015, Igor, Irina, Anastasia, and Vladimir were awoken by an armed raid on their home. Seventy or so armed policemen woke them up, took them away, and spent 20 hours tearing apart their home and their office.

It got much worse. The Bitkovs were put into cages for several days. Their daughter – remember, she had been kidnapped and repeatedly raped years earlier – was denied medication and now suffered a nervous breakdown. As the ordeal continued, she would later make multiple suicide attempts. Their infant son was torn away from them, not even permitted to stay with friends, and sent to an orphanage where he sustained facial injuries, a chipped tooth, conjunctivitis, lost the ability to speak. When the family friends recovered him, they found that even when given food little Vladimir immediately began hiding it under his shirt.

I will not say more now about the Bitkovs' harrowing ordeal. Their lawyers will speak to that, as will Bill Browder. Suffice it to say Igor, Irina, and Anastasia have remained incarcerated since January 2015.

In January of this year, despite an earlier Appeals Court ruling that the Bitkovs' alleged offense was only administrative in nature and punishable with a fine, Igor was sentenced to 19 years in prison, and Irina and Anastasia were sentenced to 14 years each. These sentences were far harsher than those given to Guatemalan officials who perpetrated the sale of passports. They are harsher than sentences given to rapists and to murderers.

What was CICIG's role in all of this? I would note Bill Browder in his testimony will point out – and I quote him, in pertinent part – “Inexplicably, VTB Bank gained the legal status as an ‘interested party’ in the Migration Case against the Bitkovs with the support of CICIG. In January 2015, a criminal case against the Bitkovs was opened at the direction of CICIG.” And as he points out, as I pointed out as well, immediately after that, “70 armed police officers raided the Bitkovs' home; arrested Irina, Igor, and Anastasia; and detained them in cage behind the parking garage in the main court building in Guatemala City.”

We need to know how this happened. What was the complicity? Where has the investigation been by our government, by the United States Department of State IG? There are a number of venues that would lend themselves to a very thorough investigation. Where's the investigation by the United Nations? All of these things are something that we are going to pursue very, very aggressively.

CICIG was invited to participate in this event. And when you hear people say, oh, they're a U.N. agency, they can't come and testify, let me just point out to everyone I wrote our trafficking laws for the United States of America. It's called the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. It is our landmark law on combating sex and labor trafficking. When I discovered that in the Democratic Republic of Congo U.N. peacekeepers were raping little children – these are the peacekeepers – I convened four hearings, traveled to D.R. Congo, went to Goma where the peacekeepers were, and invited the U.N. to come and give testimony. Now, under our rules, they weren't sworn in or were welcomed as absolute witnesses to the committee, but we have a very good way of having that kind of testimony: They gave us a briefing. It's a distinction

without a difference. And Jane Holl Lute, who was the top peacekeeping person – who was very much against what was happening there but worked for the U.N., number two – she came, and she sat right there and gave a full, thorough accounting, and also a proactive approach as to what would be done to hopefully end this abuse by U.N. peacekeepers. I’ve done it other times. Kofi Annan’s top – chief of staff also sat here and testified. So CICIG is invited. I want to ask them questions. But they declined to be here.

Just yesterday afternoon, let me point out to our friends and our witnesses, the Constitutional Court of Guatemala, the country’s highest court, upheld an earlier decision by a lower court that had granted Bitkov’s appeal to be considered migrants, and therefore under international law not able to be tried as criminals. It is not yet clear what this ruling will mean. It seems to mean that the family could be released from prison, but that they also could be deported back to Russia. And that would be unconscionable.

So I want to make, again, the appeal to the Guatemalan government, to CICIG, to our government, to the United Nations that this is the time to be focused on restoring this family as much as humanly possible and to provide them protection. They were refugees fleeing a Putin hit on them and their family, and to be treated like this is just – it’s unconscionable.

You know, I’ve been in Congress 38 years. I chair the Human Rights Subcommittee for the Foreign Affairs Committee, co-chair the Helsinki Commission and have been on that Commission since 1983, I’ve been to Russia many times when it was the Soviet Union. To know the way the Putin government follows people that they are in disagreement with, the way they rob and murder and rape – and again, we’ve got Bill Browder here, who motivated the passage of the Magnitsky Act – I just want to thank him and our witnesses for being here, because that takes bravery. People should see some of the emails we’ve gotten. That, too, is unconscionable, and I won’t get into that now.

With this hearing, I’d like to now introduce our distinguished witnesses, beginning – Is Bill first? – beginning first with Bill Browder, who has often been a witness before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. He is a true human rights advocate fighting for the weak and most vulnerable; has done it so effectively, starting with Sergei Magnitsky. And now the Magnitsky – the Global Magnitsky Act is a tool that the U.S. Department of State and even other governments now are beginning to adopt as a way of holding individuals to account when they commit crimes against humanity and human rights abuses all over the world.

Bill is the founder and CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, which was at one time the investment advisor to the largest foreign investment fund in Russia. Many of you may remember that authorities from the government of Russia arrested, tortured, and killed his lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, in November of 2009. And since then, Mr. Browder has sought justice for Magnitsky and, again, others persecuted by corrupt officials from the government of Russia and governments everywhere else.

Without objection, his full resume will be made a part of the record. But I want to thank him for his extraordinary leadership.

Then we'll hear from Victoria Sandoval, who is a criminal and human rights attorney who represents the Bitkov family. She has 15 years of experience in different areas of the law and provided technical advice to the Supreme Court of Justice of Guatemala.

Then, Rolando Alvarado is the founding partner of a law firm who represents the Bitkov family. He is an expert in cyber matters and has received related training in the United States Department of Justice on those matters. Mr. Alvarado has advised Guatemalan government ministers and legislators. And again, his full resume will be made a part of the record as well.

But I'd like to now yield such time as he may consume to Mr. Bill Browder.

**BROWDER:** Co-chairman Smith, thank you very much for inviting me here to this hearing. I'm here today to present the story of the Bitkov family to the Helsinki Commission.

As you know, Sergei Magnitsky was my lawyer. When he was murdered by the Russian government for uncovering corruption, I started a campaign for justice, which led to this Commission spearheading the Magnitsky Act in 2012 and the Global Magnitsky Act in 2016.

I also wrote a book about the Magnitsky story entitled "Red Notice." Following the publication of the book, many people got in touch with me from around the world to share their stories.

And one of those people was a woman named Irina Bitkov. Irina Bitkov shared a horrific story of how she was persecuted in the same way as Sergei Magnitsky, and she and her family fled their persecutors from Russia and ended up in Guatemala – to terrible results, which I will explain in greater detail.

I'm here today to share the Bitkovs' story because they can't be here today to do it themselves. They are currently in Guatemalan prison, where Igor Bitkov, the father, is serving a 19-year prison sentence; Irina and her daughter, Anastasia, are serving 14-year prison sentences for passport violations.

I'd like to point out that I have no business relationships with the Bitkovs. I am receiving no compensation for my advocacy here today. I'm here today because of the terrible, unconscionable injustice that they've been subject to, and I want to do something about it.

The Bitkov story starts in the 1990s, when Igor and Irina Bitkov became the owners of a successful pulp and paper business called the North West Timber Company. Over the 1990s they built their business, and it reached \$80 million in profits, and it was valued at roughly \$400 million.

In the course of their business, the Bitkov family, through their company, obtained loans from Sberbank, VTB, and Gazprom, all state-owned banks, to upgrade their facilities. After the loans were given, one of the bankers approached the Bitkovs and asked them to sell 51 percent of their business for \$25 million. Obviously, since their business was worth many multiples of that, they refused.

Following this unwanted takeover request or attempt, a terrible trauma befell the Bitkov family. At the time, their then – daughter, Anastasia, was 16 years old. She was kidnapped in St. Petersburg. The kidnappers demanded a ransom, which took the family three days to accumulate. They paid the kidnappers the ransom. Anastasia was released. But when she was safely back home, the family discovered that she had been drugged and repeatedly raped by her kidnappers. The ordeal left Anastasia deeply traumatized and set off a cascade of psychiatric ailments, which require medication and treatment to this day.

Following that, and in a further escalation of the attempts to take over their company, the Russian state banks simultaneously called in their \$158 million of loans, forcing the company into bankruptcy. During the bankruptcy proceedings, the equipment of their facilities was sold at a fraction of its true value.

The Bitkovs were then told that they would be imminently arrested. This was the moment that the Bitkov family decided to flee Russia. First, they travelled to Latvia. Then they traveled to Turkey. And in Turkey, they looked around the world to seek a country where they could find refuge and start a new life safely from the persecution of Russians. They ended up choosing Guatemala because Guatemala had no extradition treaty with Russia, and they felt that they could be safe in Guatemala.

They found an advertisement on the internet from a Latin American law firm called Cutino Associates that specializes in immigration law and advertised its expertise in organizing Guatemalan immigration for \$50,000 per person. The family engaged Cutino and began the process of becoming immigrants to Guatemala.

In their initial communications with Cutino, they explained that the reason for their immigration was to avoid persecution in Russia. Cutino explained to them that they could change their names in their immigration applications to avoid detection by the Russians. Cutino then submitted for the family and the Guatemalan migration services, they – I'm sorry, they submitted for the family papers, and the Guatemalan immigration services issued them new documents in new names. Anastasia kept her original name, hoping that because she was not targeted by the Russian authorities that she would be OK.

The family then began a new life in Guatemala. Igor became a high school math teacher at the Brillo De Sol School in Antigua. Irina became a drawing teacher at the same school. And Anastasia began a career in fashion after regaining some of her confidence after her horrible ordeal in Russia. In January 2012, Irina Bitkov gave birth to a baby boy named Vladimir. It appeared that after their terrible ordeal with the Russian authorities had come to an end and they could put that chapter behind them.

Unfortunately, their dream of a new life came crashing down in late 2003 (sic; 2013). Investigators working for VTB Bank tracked down the Bitkovs in Guatemala. The head of the VTB Bank, Andrey Kostin, personally signed a power of attorney to Henry Comte, one of the country's most prestigious attorneys in Guatemala and an alternative judge on the Guatemalan Supreme Court, to assist VTB in pursuing the Bitkovs in Guatemala.

VTB Bank and Comte's first attempt was to go after the Bitkovs in filing a criminal complaint with the Attorney General's Office of Guatemala claiming that VTB had been defrauded by the Bitkovs in Russia. VTB presented photocopies of forged documents in the Guatemalan court. Those documents already had been rejected as forgeries in similar proceedings in Russian courts. When the Guatemalan court requested originals, VTB withdrew their criminal complaint.

VTB and Henry Comte then came up with a plan B to go after the Bitkovs. For several years before 2013 in Guatemala, there had been an ongoing investigation into human trafficking and Guatemalan officials' complicity with human traffickers in the country. It was called the Migration Case, and it was supported by a U.N. organization called CICIG, whose mandate was to go after organized networks – organized crime networks who previously enjoyed impunity in Guatemala.

VTB and Comte successfully convinced CICIG to focus on the Bitkovs as part of the Migration Case in spite of the fact that the Bitkovs were clearly not part of any organized network of traffickers. Inexplicably, VTB gained the legal status as an "interested party" in the Migration Case against the Bitkovs with the support of CICIG. In January 2015, a criminal case against the Bitkovs was opened at the direction of CICIG. Immediately after, 70 armed police officers raided the Bitkovs' home; arrested Irina, Igor, and Anastasia; detained them in a cage behind the parking garage of the main court building in Guatemala.

While they were being held, Anastasia was deprived of her anti-depression medications and she has a severe psychiatric breakdown. Anastasia and her mother were moved to a hospital under armed guard, and Igor was put in pretrial detention at the Mariscal Zavala prison while he – while the case awaited trial.

The Bitkovs arranged for their family lawyer, who is sitting with us today, Rolando Alvarado, to be the guardian for their 3-year-old child, Vladimir, while they were incarcerated. In spite of Mr. Alvarado's valid guardianship papers, the Prosecutor of Guatemala filed a motion with the court calling for Vladimir Bitkov to be placed in a state orphanage instead.

At this point, the Russian government also got involved. Pavel Astakhov, the Russian government's ombudsman for children's rights, publicly called for Vladimir Bitkov to be returned to Russia to be put into a Russian orphanage. The Russian foray failed because Vladimir is only a Guatemalan citizen and could not be returned to Russia. However, the Guatemalan prosecutor's motion succeeded and Vladimir was placed in a state orphanage.

The family desperately applied to reverse the decision and get Vladimir out of the orphanage. It took 42 days for that application to be heard. When Vladimir finally emerged, he was examined by medical experts who found he had upper respiratory – an upper respiratory infection, severe inflammation of the middle ear, conjunctivitis in both eyes, scars along the left eyebrow, and chipped front teeth. They concluded that he suffered from physical and psychological abuses in the orphanage.

In the meantime, the case against the Bitkovs for passport violations moved through the courts. They were formally indicted as part of the CICIG Migration Case in April 2015.

The Bitkov family appealed the indictment in the Appeals Court, arguing that they were – they were migrants and could not be subject to criminal prosecution applicable to the traffickers. In December 2017 the Guatemalan Appeals Court ruled in favor of the Bitkovs, declaring that any passport irregularities were administrative offenses punishable by a fine and as migrants they should not be under criminal penalty.

However, CICIG and VTB were not happy with this decision, and both immediately filed appeals against the court decision that would have freed the Bitkovs. While their appeal was pending, the decision was not in force.

A few days later, on January 5th, 2018, the Guatemalan District Court found Igor, Irina, and Anastasia Bitkov guilty as users of the criminal network in the Migration Case. The court sentenced Igor to 19 years in prison, and Irina and Anastasia to 14 years. CICIG trumpeted their court victory on their website, pointing out that they prosecuted 39 people from the criminal network, including the Bitkovs.

I understand that the 19-year prison sentence that Igor Bitkov was given was greater than sentences for manslaughter, rape, burglary, and fraud in Guatemala. The sentences that all three of them were given appears to exceed the sentences of many of the government officials in Guatemala and traffickers who were part of the human trafficking network.

There was no evidence that the Bitkovs bribed any government official or were involved in any corruption. The Bitkovs, who did not speak Spanish and did not know anyone in Guatemala on arrival, relied on the law firm Cutino Associates, who presented themselves as legitimate migration lawyers. It also appears that nobody from Cutino Associates who organized their passports and settlement documents has ever been prosecuted. No other customers of Cutino have been tried, convicted, and sentenced like the Bitkovs. In the list presented by CICIG, which includes 39 people in the Migration Case, 36 were low- and middle-level government officials from different Guatemalan government bodies and a few “coyotes” who physically moved people through Guatemala.

So what is going on here? There are two big Russian themes in this case, neither of which is unusual.

First, in Russia, people who run successful businesses are routinely victimized through a process called Raiderstvo. It is – I was a victim of Raiderstvo, and so were the Bitkovs. It is a standard practice in Russia where organized criminals work together with corrupt officials to extract property and money from their victims. There are literally hundreds of thousands of businessmen in Russia who are victims of this as well.

The second theme is the abuse of international institutions. The Russian government routinely abuses international institutions in order to persecute its enemies who are not inside of Russia. In my case, the Russian government tried six times to have Interpol arrest me after the

Magnitsky Act was passed. The Russian government also successfully recruited a senior official inside the Swiss Federal Police to stymie a Swiss criminal investigation into money laundering by Russian officials in the Magnitsky case. The Russian government has succeeded in getting the deputy attorney general of Cyprus in charge of mutual legal assistance and extradition affecting the Magnitsky case and many other politically sensitive cases to inappropriately assist the Russian government in pursuing their enemies in Cyprus. This is not uncommon.

In my opinion, the Russian government succeeded in compromising CICIG and the Guatemalan prosecutor for their own purposes in the Bitkov case. CICIG and the prosecutor's office have jointly taken up the Russian government's vendetta against the Bitkovs with no good explanation. CICIG did not distance itself from the Russian persecution. They touted it on their website and they actively tried to overturn the Bitkovs' vindication by the Appeals Court.

Nor has VTB tried to hide their role in this case. In spite of the fact that VTB obtained no financial recovery for their alleged financial dispute with the Bitkovs, they became an interested party in a case involving something that had nothing to do with them in order to vindictively punish Igor Bitkov and his entire family. In The Wall Street Journal on April 4th, 2018, Igor Kostin, the chairman of VTB, says: "VTB's actions relating to the Bitkov family is an example of standard procedure in resolving financial business disputes through the available legal channels."

This is an appalling case in which the Bitkov family deserves justice, and the United States has an opportunity to deliver them justice. CICIG is a U.N. organization in which approximately 50 percent of their budget comes from the U.S. government. I do not believe that you or anyone in the U.S. Congress or the U.S. government ever envisaged that U.S. tax dollars would be spent to support a Russian government persecution of a family fleeing that persecution in Guatemala. I would recommend that CICIG's funding be suspended until this situation is resolved.

When I began this process of advocating for the Bitkov family, I discovered that CICIG is a highly contentious issue in D.C. and around the world. There are some people who are pro-CICIG and there are some who are anti-CICIG. Up until two months ago, I had never heard of CICIG. I came – I came into this case with no prejudices one way or another. I've gone where the evidence has led. And so far, the evidence leads towards the conclusion about the involvement of this organization in the Bitkovs' persecution.

As journalists from The Wall Street Journal and other news organizations have started to investigate, CICIG – started to investigate, CICIG has avoided answering a number of crucial direct questions about their role in the Bitkov case and their support of VTB. When CICIG was invited to give evidence to Congress they declined, claiming as a U.N. institution they were not accountable to anybody in Congress.

They can't have it both ways. They can either be the heroic anti-impunity organization that their mandate sets them out to be or the situation at CICIG needs to be cleaned up.

Thank you very much.

SMITH: Thank you so very much for your very incisive testimony and recommendations.

We are joined by Commissioner Hultgren. Do you have anything you'd like to offer at the opening?

HULTGREN: No. I want to hear as much as I can, so thank you. I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you so much. I would just note that Congressman Hultgren is also the co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Helsinki (sic; Human Rights) Commission and a very distinguished member of our Commission. So it's so great to have you here. Thank you.

I'd like to now recognize Ms. Sandoval.

SANDOVAL: Good morning, Chairman Smith. Good morning, Commissioner Hultgren. Distinguished members of the Helsinki Commission, for me, it is an honor to be invited to this hearing as a witness at the – of the Bitkov Case.

My name is Victoria Sandoval. I am a lawyer, and I have been working with the Bitkovs since January '15. I knew the Bitkovs back in 2011, when they came to live at the same neighborhood I was living. I could see how they were – they were a happy family raising his kid, Vladimir, into his Russian culture.

On January 15th, 2015, I saw more than 16 official vehicles from Ministerio Publico, CICIG, and Policia Nacional Civil. They were raiding the Bitkovs' house, and they were being arrested. The next day I saw the Bitkovs' house had been locked up and was being guarded by two policemen. Even though it was guarded, their house was looted completely.

They were transferred to the carceletas at the courthouse. The carceletas as the cages Bill Browder just described. These are – these are located at the basement of the – of the courthouse, and people should not stay there for more than 24 hours. But the Bitkovs were kept in for five days, Irina and Anastasia; and nine days, Igor. The Russian ambassador didn't show any concern about his fellow citizens.

Anastasia, whose life depends on the regular intake of medication, was deprived of them. A judge ordered that Anastasia and Irina be transferred to a psychiatric hospital due to Anastasia's psychiatric breakdown. The Sistema Penitenciario in charge of that transfer refused to do it for four days. It was until Anastasia's health became worse that they obeyed that order. Along with 50 agents of the Sistema Penitenciario, they were transferred to a 10-room hospital. The hospital declined receiving them because they feared such high number of officials will scare their other patients. So they were returned to the – to the courthouse, where they were locked in an annex to the men's area – only separate by a fence, which means that the men will have direct contact with them. Not even the bathroom had – not even at the bathroom they had any privacy. That meant torture for them. On the fifth day Irina and Anastasia were finally

transferred to the Hospital Concepcion, where they stayed for one year guarded by two armed guards.

In Igor's case, at the carceleta he was deprived of proper sleep. After nine days he was taken in front of the judge to give – to give his first testimony. He was completely dumbfounded, had not been provided with any translator. His Spanish was not good at that time.

At the hearing, CICIG's senior attorney, Claudia Gonzalez Orellana, clearly supported VTB Bank participation by stating that the attorney acting on behalf of the VTB Bank actually has competency due to the offenses that happened in Russia, and that the Bitkovs are avoiding justice in that country. They came to Guatemala and committed other offenses, and none of this can be left in impunity. We consider that this – that the offenses that took place in Russia and in Guatemala are related.

I have an audio that I ask to be entered in the records.

SMITH: Without objection, it will. So ordered.

SANDOVAL: After Igor was – when Igor was already at Mariscal Zavala, he was visited by the child prosecutor of the Procuraduria General de la Nacion, Harold Augusto Flores Valenzuela. He told him that he had been called and visited by CICIG officials that told him that he had to do everything in order to send Vladimir to an orphanage, that he couldn't be sent with guardians. That's why Vladimir was sent to the orphanage Amor del Nino, where he was abused. Harold Flores saw that the reports on Vladimir guardians were just fine and he chose to ignore them. Also did Judge Maria Belen Reyna Salazar. And, in consequence, Vladimir was sent to that orphanage. Flores also told that he was threatened by these – CICIG's officials that if he didn't comply he will be fire(d) or prosecuted.

All this is written in an affidavit that Igor signed that I ask that also be added to the – to the records, please.

SMITH: Without objection.

SANDOVAL: OK.

Anastasia's psychiatric disorder were triggered by her kidnapping in Russia in which she was repeatedly raped and drugged. She has been diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder and borderline syndrome. According to the psychiatric reports of the National Institute for Forensic Science of Guatemala, INACIF, that also has stated that Anastasia should not be sent to a prison because it could cause her to make further attempts to commit suicide. She has already attempted five times to suicide.

Ignoring this, the president of the tribunal, Judge Yassmin Barrios, ordered to send her to the Mariscal Zavala prison for 14 years, judge threatening her, as well as the warden of the prison, with sending her to the Federico Mora Psychiatric Hospital if she saw – if she shows any sign of her illness.

I also have the link to a video that was recorded by BBC where it shows the condition of this National Mental Hospital, qualifying it as the worst in the – in the American continent. So I ask it to be added at the records.

SMITH: Without objection.

SANDOVAL: Thank you.

Ignoring this, the president of the tribunal, Judge – I'm sorry – the Bitkovs were sentenced for 19 and 14 years in prison last January 5th by the tribunal proceeded by Judge Yassmin Barrios. There are many similar cases of people accused of similar offenses, but they have all been treated very differently.

Among them I will like to describe you this one that is rather shocking. In February 2018 – that means one month later after the Bitkovs' verdict – a verdict was issued by the same tribunal proceeded by Judge Yassmin Barrios. Two members of the dangerous and notorious MS-13 were condemned to suspended prison for five years and no expulsion for the same offenses. These members of the MS-13, Israel Antonio Cabrera, whose alias is "the demon," and Mauricio Antonio Rivas, alias "the goat," were from El Salvador, and there they have been accused of murdering 25 people. Now they are free in Guatemala's streets.

The evil within this – I'm sorry. I also have this ruling that I will ask to be also added to the – to the records.

The evil within this case is shocking. The Kremlin, through VTB Bank, has conspired in the Guatemalan justice system to, one, separate a 3-year-old boy from his family and send him to an orphanage where he was tortured; two, to lock up in a prison a young woman with a psychiatric disorder; and finally, and third, condemn with ridiculous punishment a family who went to Guatemala in order to flee Russian persecution that was threatening to destroy their lives in contravention of Palermo Convention, Guatemalan migration law, and other – and order – and an order from the Constitutional Court.

Anastasia told me one: I have suffered a lot. My life has never been even close to normal. I want to fight so my little brother can have a normal life, and he still has still some time to do that.

Thank you very much.

SMITH: Thank you so very much for your testimony and for your bravery in helping the Bitkov family.

I would like to now yield the floor to Mr. Alvarado.

(Note: Mr. Alvarado's remarks are made through an interpreter.)

ALVARADO: Good morning, Co-Chair Smith, distinguished members of the – microphone.

Good morning, co-chair Smith, distinguished members of the Helsinki Commission, and all – everyone here in this room. It's an honor for me to have been invited to this hearing to bear witness in the Bitkov case.

I am knowledgeable about what has transpired in the case involving the Russian family the Bitkov family because I personally met Irina Bitkova and Anastasia Bitkova two years before they were arrested. I am knowledgeable about the facts surrounding their case because I was the lawyer of their family and am – currently I have guardianship over their child and have had since 2015 – that's Vladimir Bitkov, who is now six years of age. That is the son of Igor and Irina.

So the activities for which the Bitkov family has been accused are as follows: for the use of a passport and identify documents that were issued by the Guatemalan state, and that CICIG and the Public Ministry of the Office of the Attorney General considered – now consider to have been issued illegally.

So these activities do not constitute a crime; however, CICIG and the Public Ministry brought criminal charges which were egregiously disproportionate as if they had been crimes of drug trafficking or terrorism, crimes of high impact. Furthermore, CICIG brought criminal charges or pursued criminal proceedings before special courts known as courts for cases involving high levels of risk, and these for what amount to migratory law misdemeanors.

CICIG has no jurisdiction to take part as a complainant against the Bitkov family because the mandate given it by the United Nations and by the government of Guatemala establishes that said commission would only have jurisdiction to investigate crimes committed by members of illegal security forces or clandestine security bodies or forces. And the Bitkov family was not accused of being a part of these illegal security forces, and therefore does not fall under the aegis of the authority entrusted to CICIG, which means that CICIG has overstepped its boundaries in exercising these legal powers, which is tantamount to the abuse of authority.

Furthermore, CICIG, in violating the agreement that gave rise to its creation, is also in violation of the Palermo Convention because it has deliberately accused or charged the victims in this case – the immigrants, the Bitkov family – and not – did not bring charges against the perpetrators of these crimes, which is the Cutino international organization, which is a trafficking organization.

Despite the fact that the activities that the Bitkov family were accused of don't constitute any crime, the following ensued. On January the 15th of 2015, CICIG and the Public Ministry, with the support of the national police, carried out three searches. I personally witnessed the search that was conducted in the Bitkov family home. It lasted 20 hours and close to 70 police officers who were heavily armed took part in that search. They went into their rooms while they were sleeping and they didn't even let them get dressed in privacy. They weren't allowed to call their lawyer until three hours after the beginning of the search.

I asked the prosecutor, Stuart Ernesto Campo Aguilar, why there were so many police officers, and he told me that this case stemmed from a million-dollar – a multimillion-dollar fraud case that the Bitkov family had committed against a Russian bank, and it was the Russian bank that was bringing criminal charges against the Bitkov family.

So they seized vehicles, jewelry and the personal belongings of the Bitkov family. And after that, the national police actually looted their home. So this search lasted until 1:40 in the early morning of the next day, when it finally ended. And that was when they woke up Vladimir, the little boy, and they put him in a pickup truck headed to the courts in – that was open at that hour. The child was only three years old. All this information can be found in the search warrant, which I would ask be admitted on the record.

SMITH: Without objection, so ordered.

ALVARADO: So the judge in chambers, the judge on that shift at that time, granted me custody of the child, and also appointed, as custodian of this child, the baby sitter Veronica Gonzalez. On February the 10th of 2015, Judge Maria Belen Reyna Salazar illegally ruled that the child be taken away from their legal guardians – from us, their legal guardians – alleging that we were not the child's relatives and that even the identity of their – of the child's parents was in question. That doubt or question about the child's identity stemmed from a report that the Special Prosecutors Office Against Impunity, FECCI, had sent in which it states that the identity of Vladimir was flawed. And that is the rationale under which the child was sent to the orphanage called Amor del Nino, Love of the Child, where he was kept for 42 days.

The judge denied any visitation rights to little Vladimir, which means that he was left entirely alone. He emerged from this orphanage with a broken tooth, with a scar above his eyebrow, with conjunctivitis, and with amibus (ph). I have the medical records of the injuries sustained by Vladimir. And I would ask that they be admitted to the record.

SMITH: Without objection, so ordered.

ALVARADO: From the outset of this – of these proceedings, the VTB Bank justified its participation in the proceedings, alleging that it had been defrauded in Russia by the Bitkov family. The involvement of the VTB Bank was always supported and defended by CICIG through CICIGs agent that had the power of attorney to operate on CICIGs behalf, Claudia Gonzalez Orellana, who declared to a judge that the facts that occurred in Russia were related to facts that occurred in Guatemala, and therefore VTB Bank should be allowed to defend its interests in Guatemala.

The Bitkov family said that the identity documents had been processed by a law firm known as Cutino International. Cutino was never investigated by CICIG, despite the fact that the Bitkov family presented two reports requesting – or, reported Cutino requesting that it be investigated, and offering sufficient evidence with which to identify the responsible parties. Igor declared that the payment made to Cutino was done via bank transfer, and asked CICIG to look into that, to trace that transfer. It was also reported that the Cutino – that is, the Cutino case, or its involvement, was also reported directly to Commissioner Ivan Velasquez. And we have a

video showing the conversation between Commissioner Velasquez and Irina that also bears witness to the political persecution perpetrated by Russia.

So we have sufficient evidence. And we provided that evidence to Commissioner Velasquez, as well as a letter written by Senator Roger Wicker of 2015, yet the commissioner did not act on that evidence presented. CICIG then participated as a complainant against the immigrants, the Bitkov family, and asked for 19 – a 19-year prison sentence. And such a sentence has never been meted out against any other foreigner.

During the – during the debate, the manager of the company that issued the passports stated that thousands of passports are processed irregularly on a regular basis, and in favor of foreign nationals. Furthermore, the witness Carlos Rene Gomez Diaz stated in witness testimony that the General Office on Migration issued between 1 and 3 illegal passports every week in favor of foreign nationals. However, only the Bitkov family – or the Bitkov family was the only family ever to be given prison sentences. And the few foreigners who were ever tried only received commuted sentences. That is to say that instead of going to jail, all they had to do was pay a fine and go back to their country of origin.

Another illegal act that emerged during the criminal proceedings was that before the Bitkov family was found guilty, during the discussion a superior constitutional court granted a writ of amparo in favor of Igor Bitkov. And in the sentence said that migrants cannot be criminally tried. CICIG appealed that sentence, and the court did not follow through with the – did not adhere to the ruling that had been issued regarding the prior appeals. Anastasia Bitkova was sent to prison, despite the fact that she suffers a psychiatric illness, and that as a result of this her life is in danger.

Yesterday the constitutional court, the highest court of Guatemala, issued a sentence whereby it declares that the Bitkov family are immigrant and they never should have been criminally tried. This confirms the human rights violations that were perpetrated against the Bitkov family that I have described in my witness testimony. Furthermore, the human rights ombudsman's office has said that the rights of the child, the rights of Vladimir, the boy, were also violated by the judge who illegally sent him to an orphanage. So everything that I have said can be legally substantiated. And all of these illegal acts that destroyed the Bitkov family were carried out at the request of CICIG and the Public Ministry. And these are acts that cannot go unpunished – cannot remain in impunity. Thank you very much.

SMITH: Thank you very much for your testimony and for your very incisive words today. Let me just begin the questioning with Mr. Browder first.

Thank you for giving us a backdrop of how the Russian officials act – *reiderstvo*, as you said. And you also pointed out that you have been victimized by this as well, so you speak from a first-person account. Six times the Russian government tried to get Interpol to arrest you for your incredible work on the Magnitsky Act. I would just point, parenthetically – and the press might want to take note of this – I've traveled to the Soviet Union when it was the Soviet Union, on behalf of the Soviet Jews, on behalf of religious freedom. And always got a visa. When I worked to get the Magnitsky Act passed, I was denied a visa. And I haven't gotten once since.

I had hoped to go to Russia to talk and work with them in combatting human trafficking. I've worked with a number of NGOs in Moscow and elsewhere that combat human trafficking and help Russian women who are victimized. And yet, the long arm of this corruption denied me – continues to deny me a visa to go to Russia. That's nowhere near as burdensome and threatening, of course, as what you have faced and so many of these others.

You also point out that thousands of businessmen are in jail who are victims of this. And that's the best-kept secret out there. Some journalists have pointed this out, but this is common practice. It's not an exception. It's a common practice. And so, if you could, Mr. Browder, you know, you also talked about how a Swiss Federal Police – they successfully recruited a senior official inside the Swiss Federal Police, to stymie a criminal investigation into money laundering. So this is a modus operandi that is global. And this is a manifestation that has happened with CICIG complicity in Guatemala. How do they do it? Do they pay people? You did point out in your testimony that a very distinguished attorney was hired by VTB Bank, Henry Comte, as you point out.

And I mean, so a plan was hatched. Obviously, or likely, huge amounts of money were conveyed to interested parties. Then all of a sudden, with the support of CICIG, they are part of the migration case. And again, when it comes to trafficking, I take a backseat to no one because I've written four major laws on combatting human trafficking, including our first. And there's nowhere here any suggestion that the Bitkovs are involved with trafficking.

They are involved in trying to protect their children from – and just let me say parenthetically that Pavel Astakhov, the Russian government's ombudsman for children's rights, cut off inter-country adoptions, which had been a lifeline for Russian children finding homes – loving homes in the United States and elsewhere. But that was a total reaction to the Magnitsky Act, that we were finally holding people who are corrupt and commit serious, serious human rights abuses personally responsible for their crimes.

So if you could further elaborate on that backdrop, because the question is why and whether or not there were bribes involved, who was paid, why did they become a part of this? Nineteen years, fourteen years, fourteen years prison sentences. You know, I've never seen anything like this, except in gulag states. You know, Guatemala is not a gulag state, but they certainly have a situation that is outrageous. So if you could give us – talk about that back – you know, the –

**BROWDER:** That's an excellent question, and a crucial question. The Russian government has unlimited resources that they're using to corrupt and infiltrate international institutions. We have evidence of their involvement in corruption in the Swiss Federal Police, as I mentioned. We have evidence of involvement in their – in the corruption of the deputy attorney general of Cyprus. And we have evidence of their involvement in the corruption of international organizations like the Olympics. We have evidence of their involvement in all sorts of activities like that.

And what the Russian government does is they poke around to see who is susceptible to corruption and bribery. And many people say no. But they find people who say yes. And they have plenty of money to do it. They know exactly how to do it, because they do it all day, every day inside their own country. And so they're experienced at doing it. And the Putin regime does it in foreign countries. And they find willing takers.

And what makes it more pernicious is that once the person has become involved in their corruption, they threaten them with murder if they stop doing it. So they say: You've taken our money. If you stop doing the things we ask you to do, not only will we expose you, but we will kill you. And so people become very scared of backing down. And so we see a lot of situations where people have been corrupted and they dig their heels in, even after they've been exposed, because they're so afraid of their – of the people who corrupted them in the first place.

I do not have any direct evidence of why CICIG was involved in this inexplicable persecution of the Bitkov –

SMITH: But there is no doubt that they are.

BROWDER: The Bitkovs have been inexplicably persecuted by CICIG, with the involvement of VTB Bank. That we have evidence. That evidence has been presented today. I don't know why. But it tends to be that when people behave irrationally, when this organization which is supposed to be an anti-impunity human rights organization is persecuting a Russian family who is fleeing for their life, the obvious question is why. And we can't leave it unanswered.

And I've seen the answers that CICIG has tried to give for justifying themselves. And none of those answers make any sense or address the crucial questions. Why were they supporting VTB in court hearings? Why did they, together with VTB, appeal the exoneration of the Bitkovs by the Supreme Court? None of these questions have been answered by them. And they refused to show up here today to answer those questions. And you need to get answers to those questions.

SMITH: Well, I would assure you, we will ask them again to come. I will pose a series of questions in total transparency. We want to know when was the decision made? By whom, or how many people were involved in that decision, whether or not there was any kind of conveyance of financial money of any kind, anything of value. And as I said in my opening, there needs to be a full and robust investigation of CICIG's complicating in this persecution of a family that was trying to evade a modus operandi of the Russian corruption system. And this is how they do it. And they do it everywhere they can get away with it. And they should not be a part of that in any way, shape, or form.

I would point out you said in your statement that the Wall Street Journal April 4th article, and you quote Igor Kostin, the chairman of the VTB Bank, where he says, "VTB's action relating to the Bitkov family is an example of standard procedure in resolving financial business disputes through the available legal channels." Persecute, give massive prison sentences, put a young woman named Anastasia, a daughter, tried to abduct – and I would call this a kidnapping

– of a young boy, who was not even Russian. He’s Guatemalan, born in Guatemala. To kidnap him back to an orphanage. And the very man doing it is the one who ended inter-country adoptions in Russia.

We got a letter to the Commission from the VTB Bank, from the general counsel. And he says that: VTB has a model corporate citizen. VTB has worked to combat corruption. Every action we have taken comports with global norms. Well, let’s hope that they are completely transparently open to the investigation and will answer every question and provide every set of documents asked and requested by either the U.S. government or any other responsible body in trying to get to the bottom of this. Because this kind of assertion, when people are suffering so cruelly in prison as we meet here today, is beyond comprehension.

Let me ask you, if I could, what do you make of the attempt to abduct Vladimir and to take him back to a Russian orphanage, as if the Russian government owns this little boy rather than his loving parents and you, who have tried to provide help and assistance to him, and love.

BROWDER: It’s very clear. So the VTB Bank and their co-conspirators stripped the Bitkov family of all their wealth back in Russia. There was nothing – there was nothing more to get. The cupboards were empty. And so many people ask me when they look at this case: Why? Why are they doing this? And I believe that the answer is very similar to the answer of why they attempted to murder Sergei Skripal, which is Sergei Skripal had no more intelligence to provide the U.K. government. But the purpose of both of these exercises for different audiences – and these are all directed towards domestic audiences. In the Skripal case, it was to say: If you – if you are – if you betray us, it doesn’t matter where you go, it doesn’t matter when you go, we’ll track you down anywhere in the world and we will kill you and we will kill your family. That’s the message to their secret service.

In the Bitkov case, the message for VTB Bank and other banks is: If we come and ask you to sign over your wealth to us don’t object, because look what happened to the Bitkov family. We tracked them down in Guatemala. And we didn’t just go after Igor Bitkov. We went after his wife, his daughter, and their three-year-old son. And we will destroy you and we’ll destroy everybody. That’s the message that they’re trying to send to anybody they’re trying to extract money from in Russia. So the next time they go and ask them for money, the people will say: Here you go. Let me sign the papers.

SMITH: Has CICIG or any Guatemalan authority ever provided justification why the prison sentences are so outrageously long, or a document?

BROWDER: I’m not an expert on Guatemalan law, but the documents that I’ve seen, they just rotely write down the justification by the judge, which it reads like something out of Kafka, suppression of civil status, five years. Alteration of government document, seven years – or eight years. And none of this stuff makes any sense when you sort of step away and say let’s look at the real-world situation. As Mr. Alvarado has said – or, actually, I think it was Victoria who said that members of the Nicaraguan criminal gangs that have killed 25 people were given suspended sentences for the same crime. How does that work?

SMITH: Let me ask you, what is the relationship between Guatemalan law enforcement and judicial authorities and CICIG? How easily can those authorities say no to a CICIG instruction regarding the prosecution of, say, the Bitkovs?

BROWDER: I think this would be a question better the Guatemalan lawyers.

SANDOVAL: They have a very big power. They are not accountable to anyone to Guatemala. They have the power to destroy careers, professionals. There is many people that fears them. Might be people that have something beneath them that they can be chased for and that helps them control them, maybe. People – many judges try to please them. They try to please them what they are – they asked. Thank you.

SMITH: OK. Could I ask you about, Vladimir, what is the state of health right now? You know, how well or poorly is he doing? And –

ALVARADO: After he got out of the orphanage we've had to hire psychological therapy – intensive psychological therapy for him. He would wake up at night having awful nightmares. So he's six years old now. He had just turned three when I got him. And he has matured quite a bit. He has been forced to grow up really fast. And something really interesting that he says all the time. And that is, if I weren't a kid I would be in jail.

SMITH: And if I could, on Anastasia, who has suffered so much, having been raped, denied her medicine, as you've pointed out in your testimonies, in another manifestation of cruelty in this whole process. How is she faring?

SANDOVAL: She's having a very hard time right now since, as I told you, she has been threatened to be sent to the Federico Mora National Mental Hospital. This hospital, as I told you before, has been qualified as the worst hospital in whole American continent. And she fears to be free to express herself because she thinks people might interpret that as she's having a breakdown and she could be sent, because the Judge Yassmin Barrios, a few days after they were sent to Mariscal Zavala, ordered the National Forensic Science Institute to go and check on her to see if it was necessary to send her to that hospital. So she's living through a living hell, not being able to be herself. She is trying to fit in what she cannot fit completely.

SMITH: Thank you. If I could ask you, who is Mayra Veliz? Are you aware of any position she may have had in any of the organizations, entities that are relevant during the time period pertinent to the Bitkov case? And to the best of your knowledge, are you aware of CICIG or the attorney general of Guatemala investigating Mayra Veliz for wrongdoing or bringing any charges against her?

ALVARADO: So Mayra Veliz is the secretary general of the Public Ministry. That means she's second in authority after the prosecutor or the attorney general himself. So she was the – she worked in immigration policy. And she was the one who would sign off on documents or sign for national documents because she worked in the – that part of the Public Ministry responsible for foreign affairs involving foreign nationals. Now, there's a rumor that one hears

constantly in the halls of the courts to the effect that Mayra Veliz is closely associated with Cutino International.

So recently a lawyer visited Igor in jail and reported to him some information about Mayra Veliz to the fact that for some time when she worked in migration she would sign the documents for different foreign nationals, some of whom were Arab – of Arab descent, Pakistanis. And also, that she had signed the documents for members of ISIS, that is the Islamic State. So this lawyer provided his name and phone number. He does not want to be a witness in Guatemala because he fears for his life. What he wants is for the United States to call him, to grant him special protection in exchange for his providing information on this criminal structure – information that he has on it.

So this leader, as we identified him as being – the leader of this criminal structure that is the Cutino International that CICIG did not want to investigate is Marcos Cutino. So this lawyer said that Marcos Cutino goes by different alias, different names, in the U.S. and Mexico, Canada and Guatemala.

SMITH: We're quickly running out of time, if you could provide – OK.

ALVARADO: Sorry. Something very interesting about the Bitkov case that's suspicious is that when we reported this criminal activity on the part of this criminal structure, Cutino International, two days after that, Thelma Aldana that is, the prosecutor general of the country – or, we actually heard from lawyers who identified themselves as American lawyers, said that they were already aware of this case, and of the fact that we were reporting this case to the attorney general, and they wanted to meet with us about it. So these reports were also sent to CICIG. And they asked us what we – OK, we asked for a hearing, a meeting with Thelma Aldana the prosecutor general, and rather than being met by her, it was Mayra Veliz who received us. And so I think that this warrants that the U.S. government conduct an in-depth investigation into what the true roll of Mayra Veliz is.

SMITH: Thank you.

Ms. Jackson Lee.

JACKSON LEE: Let me thank the witnesses that have come this morning – Victoria Sandoval, Rolando Alvarado, and Mr. Browder. This Commission, Helsinki Commission, for those of us who are on it, is taken enormously seriously. And I thank the presiding chair.

Our time is short so, Mr. Browder, let me just say to you that my outrage is mounting. And of course, as we are involved in the trail of Russian involvement in the 2016 elections, we're beginning to see their – certainly their despotic handprint across the world as it relates to humanitarian issues. So let me just quickly ask just one question which disturbs me. I was at the United Nations this past Monday. And I have long been a supporter of the value of the United Nations. So I am interested in how we can intervene and while the CICIG, a U.N.-backed organization to promote the rule of law, allowed the Bitkovs to be treated as scandalous passport

violators. And is there any hope in that entity, and/or the United Nations – because the husband and wife are still incarcerated. The daughter, I did not hear where, I'm sorry.

BROWDER: Is incarcerated as well.

JACKSON LEE: Is incarcerated. And the son is now back in Guatemala.

BROWDER: The son is with Mr. Alvarado.

JACKSON LEE: Yes. But can we just go to that question about how it was fraudulently made into an organization that would do what they did to the Bitkovs?

BROWDER: So the Russians are specialists at this. As I mentioned, they've abused Interpol, in my case. And let me – let me point something out, which is that from everything that I've been told, the concept of CICIG is a good concept. To fight impunity and fight human rights abuses with a strong organization is a good concept, as is Interpol for going after fugitives. The issue is not the organization itself, but it's if that organization is being abused. And we – I've seen how Interpol's abused, which doesn't make the argument that we shouldn't have Interpol. It makes the argument that we should set up checks and balances and reviews so that abuses can't happen.

It appears, from this gross abuse of process with the Bitkovs by CICIG that there's something wrong in their controls and their reviews. And this is a highly politicized story. There's many people at this hearing. Many people probably disagree with me about even bringing up CICIG. But how could I not when they've been involved in this terrible persecution of this family? And so there needs to be a review. And if it turns out that there was corruption or malfeasance, then those people need to be punished.

And there needs to be a checks and balances in place so that doesn't happen in the future. There are many U.N. organizations, as Chairman Smith has told us, that function badly. And in the case of raping – in Africa, raping young girls by U.N. peacekeepers, bad things do happen by organizations that are set up for good purposes. There's a bad thing that's happened here. And it needs to be reviewed. And it needs to be reviewed aggressively and thoroughly.

JACKSON LEE: Let me just conclude my point and say that obviously peacekeepers are the soldiers that are offered by countries. I would give, not the U.N. a pass, but I would explain that they are, you know, extensions thereof, and certainly should not be condoned in their behavior. In this instance, I think the U.N. can be involved positively. I would like to have a way for the Helsinki Commission to – we have a lot of hearings – but to take this issue on. It is tragic what has happened, but I think the important point for the world to hear is that Russia acts as an international thug. And what has happened is the world allows it to do so. Not the Russian people – that I respect and love. I'm sure they're there doing all they can for their families. But we have to say to the Russian government, the intelligence agency, Vladimir Putin, that enough is enough in thuggery. So I hope that we will pursue this, Mr. Chairman. And with that, I yield back.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Ms. Lee.

And that is why we're having this hearing. This is the first step in what will be a series of not only hearings but action items. I agree with Mr. Browder that we need to suspend CICIG's funding. I mean, this is outrageous. This is cruel and degrading treatment. I mean, even the Convention Against Torture body – you know, the implementing body ought to be looking at this. To so mistreat people for a document? And the document was done – if my family were in that situation and we were fighting to get into another country because the goons from Russia were on the prowl to take out their lives, you know, so you end up with a document to try to protect you. And then you get 19 years, 14 years, and 14 years – it is absolutely outrageous. This is cruel and degrading treatment. And we will pursue this aggressively.

I would like to – with that, I would ask unanimous consent that statements by Marco Rubio, James Lankford, and Michael Lee – three senators who couldn't be here today but wanted to express their strongly held opinion – be made a part of the record.

Again, I thank you so much for – we're only finishing up because we do have a whole series of votes. Thank you so much for your testimony and for your leadership. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:00 a.m., the hearing ended.]