

# Secret visa bans over death of Russian whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky

Lawyer's death in police custody leads to Home Office secretly barring up to 60 Russian officials from entering Britain

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**Mark Townsend**

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Sergei Magnitsky was tortured and beaten in the hours before his death, according to human rights activists

At least 60 Russian officials implicated in the controversial death of a whistleblower have been secretly banned from entering the UK by the British government.

Lawyer Sergei Magnitsky was working for Hermitage Capital Management, a British-based investment fund, when he exposed a tax fraud worth £144m, the biggest in Russian history.

After making accusations against Interior Ministry officials, he was arrested and then died in police custody after being denied medical care. [Human rights](#) activists say that the father-of-two was tortured and badly beaten in the hours before his death in November 2009. John McCain, the former US presidential candidate, and others have called for sanctions against Russian officials implicated in Magnitsky's death.

Although David Cameron raised the case during his visit to Moscow last month, the British government has been reluctant to publicly confront the Kremlin. However, the *Observer* has been told that the Home Office has introduced sanctions against an unspecified number of individuals linked to Magnitsky's death.

The move, which has not been publicised for fear of doing damage to Anglo-Russian relations, follows the lead of the US, which introduced visa bans for individuals accused of involvement. Washington's decision last August provoked [Russia's](#) foreign ministry to draw up its own blacklist of banned US government officials.

Former UK foreign minister Chris Bryant said the immigration minister, Damian Green, had confirmed the British visa ban to him. Labour MP Bryant said: "From conversations

with Damian Green, I took it that these people would not be welcomed. It seems now as if there is a secret ban on these people."

However, he added that the government should move beyond the constraints of diplomacy and announce the ban. "America and countries in the EU are moving towards a full open public ban on these people. If people are not welcome, they should make it clear they are not welcome; not just privately to the individual, but publicly, because it would make it absolutely clear to anybody else that if you are engaged in corruption and criminality in Russia, you are not coming to Britain."

The Home Office said it would not comment on individual cases, but added: "We can refuse a visa when an individual's character, conduct or associations make entry to the UK undesirable."

William Browder, who runs Hermitage Capital Management and directly employed Magnitsky at the time of his death, said: "There are numerous examples of the Home Office naming individuals such as Snoop Dogg and Martha Stewart who have been banned from entering the UK."

Magnitsky's colleagues have also accused a number of policemen, investigators and prison officials of orchestrating his death to silence him. The US Senate's Helsinki Commission names at least 60 officials as being involved.

The development follows the revelation that a number of individuals allegedly implicated in the Magnitsky case have been routinely allowed into the UK. Logs from the Russian Border Service database, leaked to the *Observer*, show that among them are a convicted fraudster and two senior Russian detectives against whom the lawyer had testified over their role in the fraud.

The logs show that Dmitry Klyuev, who received a suspended sentence in Russia in 2006 for a £1m attempted fraud, visited London twice during the summer of 2008, using a private jet to travel from Moscow and stopping en route on both occasions in Italy. Klyuev has admitted in court to owning USB, a small Russian bank that received the money made from the fraud uncovered by Magnitsky.

Other individuals implicated in the case who have visited the UK include the senior police officers that Magnitsky accused of facilitating the tax rebate scam – Artyom Kuznetsov and Pavel Karpov. During June 2007, the pair raided Hermitage Capital Management's offices in Moscow without a warrant and seized documents believed to have been used in creating the fraud. The visits appear to have stopped abruptly, with the last flight to the UK recorded on 31 January.

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