

38th FIDH Congress
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Urgent resolution : Russia: crackdown on the Russian civil society

Presented by ADC Memorial

In 2012-2013 the situation for civil society in Russia has deteriorated significantly. The strongest in last 20 years protests against re-election of President Putin and the falsifications in both Parliamentary elections and those of the President were followed by an inadequate hard repression. Indeed, within one year the Russian authorities have initiated a large-scale crackdown on civil liberties, passing in 2012 a raft of new repressive measures in record time flagrantly contradicting the right to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. In January 2013 the State Duma voted in the first parliamentary reading of a bill prohibiting the “propaganda of homosexuality among minors” which broad and imprecise definition leaves an open space for the large misuse of this discriminatory legislation if it is adopted.

The repressive practices against opposition members, human rights defenders, artists and minority groups have further and dramatically intensified within a year. Notorious case of young women from "Pussy Riot" group who dared to sing a political protest song in the main Orthodox Cathedral and were sentenced to two years of prison is just one of the examples.

“Bolotnaya case” brought to criminal charges and most probably years of imprisonment dozens of political activists and peaceful demonstrators, those who took part in the protests against Inauguration of Putin and came to Bolotnaya square in Moscow on May 6, 2012, where police attacked the demonstrators and later claimed them in militant disobedience.

This hardening of the repression of dissent voices evidences Russia’s flagrant refusal to comply with international human rights standards.

Moreover, right while a resolution was adopted by the UN Human Rights Council this spring recalling that “domestic law and administrative provisions [...] should facilitate the work of human rights defenders, including by avoiding any criminalization, stigmatization, impediments, obstructions or restrictions thereof contrary to international human rights law”, dozens of NGOs were and still are being subjected to inspections by Government officials across the Russian Federation.

Since the end of March and until today, dozens of inspections of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been launched in at least 13 regions of the Russian Federation. Across the country, these operations have been conducted by prosecutors, together with, in some cases, officials from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Ministry of Emergencies, the Federal Service for Supervision of Protection of Consumer Rights and Human Well-Being, the Tax Inspectorate, the Centre E, a unit specialised in anti-extremism, and even the fire service.

Inspections have particularly targeted groups that supposedly receive foreign funding and conduct monitoring or advocacy work. NGOs have been given short deadlines to provide a huge amount of documents and vague and non-exhaustive lists of requirements.

Intensified reprisals have been carried out in April 2013 against the FIDH member organisation in Russia, ADC Memorial, one of the most active Russian NGOs in combating discrimination, who has recently been charged of having published and distributed report to the United Nations informing about the police abuse of vulnerable minorities while not registering NGO as a “foreign agent” as the new legislation requires. ADC Memorial case is

brought to court already, as well as two other NO's in St.Peteresburg, also specialized in opposing discrimination - LGBT cinema festival "Side by Side" and LGBT NGO "Coming out", both accused in campaigning against homophobic laws.

Another FIDH member organisation, Citizen Watch, has received an official warning that they might be recognized as a "foreign agent" which can further bring them to the same kind of troubles. All the NGOs legitimately refusing this insulting and anti-constitutional label risk heavy fines and eventual closure of the organisation.

38th Congress of FIDH condemns these unprecedented in the post-Soviet Russia attack on the civil liberties and organisations and call the Russian authorities to review the freedom-killing legislations and immediately stop the harassment of the human rights defenders carrying their legitimate and necessary work. The international community should give an adequate and strong response requesting Russia to respect its international commitments and obligations, and its own Constitution.