



fidh

RUSSIA: “CRIMES AGAINST HISTORY”

THE TERM 'CRIMES AGAINST HISTORY' DENOTES EXTREME ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS AGAINST HISTORY PRODUCERS COMMITTED BY AUTHORITARIAN OR TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Russian State has been busy constructing and enforcing an official historical narrative that centres on the glorification of Soviet-era achievements, most prominently the victory in the Second World War, while downplaying or justifying the mass atrocities committed by the Soviet regime, including the Stalinist “Great Terror.” The aggressive historical memory policy pursued by the State not merely marginalizes alternative viewpoints, but also violates the rights of independent historians, publicists, journalists, civil society activists, and NGOs working on the subject of historical memory in Russia.

THE REPORT

Our report analyses the human rights situation of historians, NGOs, activists, journalists, and other history producers working on the historical memory of the Soviet past in Russia. We do so through the prism of ‘crimes against history,’ a term denoting a range of extreme abuses of history committed by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. This term has a particular pertinence to Russia, where State authorities have accorded an increasingly central role to historical memory of the Soviet past in self-legitimation and national identity-building, while trampling human rights along the way.

Based on empirical research, including 16 interviews, the report comprehensively catalogues repressive acts related to historical memory that constitute violations of human rights:

- the design and implementation of laws that obstruct the work of civil society, such as the infamous “Foreign Agents” law, as well as memory laws that restrict freedom of expression, including the prohibition of criticism of the Soviet Union’s actions during the Second World War, and insults to State symbols;
- practices of censorship, such as making it impossible to publish research on certain undesirable topics, like collaborationism with Nazi Germany, or to collaborate with foreign counterparts, particularly if they are from the Baltic States, Poland, or Ukraine;
- propaganda pushing the regime’s meta-narrative through the establishment of patriotic institutions, including the Russian Military Historical Society and the Russian Historical Society; through the introduction of unified history textbooks that among other things claim that the Soviet Union entered into the Second World War in June 1941; and through inculcating a patriotic vision of the past, and creating a climate of intolerance and fear among independent historians;
- denial of access to archives, which play a special role in impeding the work of historians; of our 16 interviewees, ten have identified restrictions on access to archives as a key impediment to historical memory work in Russia, while others have identified a general tendency towards more secrecy since the early 2000s;
- increasing restrictions on commemorative and other public events that take the form of “encouragements” not to hold them, and condoning attacks on them by private actors;
- failure to provide effective remedies or reparations to victims of Soviet-era crimes and their families or to hold perpetrators accountable; and
- smear campaigns and intimidation against independent civil society actors like International Memorial, and malicious prosecutions of historians, most notably Yuri Dmitriev.

foto-memorial.org

The report also analyses the identified “crimes against history” from the standpoint of international human rights law and Russian constitutional law. Our main finding is that violations of the human rights of history producers dealing with the legacy of Soviet-era crimes have become widespread and systematic in Russia. They, therefore, rise to the level of “crimes against history” and affect not only history producers, but also the entire Russian society, as well as the international community at large.

In order to reduce infringement of freedom of expression and other human rights in the light of current historical memory policies in Russia, FIDH makes the following recommendations to the Russian authorities and intergovernmental organizations.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

Freedom of Expression

- (a) Remove references to “historical truth” from the Constitution;
- (b) Repeal the “Exoneration of Nazism” law;
- (c) Terminate pending criminal cases concerning the expression of opinions about historical facts;
- (g) Declassify all archives of Soviet security services and ensure full public access to them;
- (h) Amend regulations regarding access to the files of criminal and related cases against the victims of Soviet-era persecution, and provide full public access to such files, including information about State officials involved in persecution;

Freedom of Association

- (i) Repeal the “Foreign Agent” law, and provide that independent NGOs are free to receive funding from any domestic, foreign, or international sources;
- (j) Ensure that independent NGOs are not subjected to arbitrary inspections, penalties, or other forms of administrative pressure;

Freedom of Assembly

- (k) Amend laws regarding public assemblies, and ensure that peaceful assemblies surrounding historical memory matters, or otherwise, are not subject to arbitrary bans and dispersals, and that their participants are not arrested and convicted solely for participation in or organization of such assemblies;

The Right to Fair Trial and the Right to Liberty

- (n) Review criminal cases against independent historians, including Yuri Dmitriev, and civil society activists working on issues of historical memory that raise issues of politically motivated prosecution, and immediately release Dmitriev and other political prisoners;

The Right to Work, the Right to an Effective Remedy, and the Right to Truth

- (o) Ensure respect for academic freedom at universities and other academic institutions; refrain from interference into academic matters, including educational curricula;
- (p) Ensure respect for and promote diversity in the teaching of history at schools and universities; repeal the Unified Historical and Cultural Standard;
- (q) Ensure that historians are not dismissed or otherwise reprimanded by their employers for the expression of opinions about historical facts or collaboration with foreign historians;
- (t) Undertake effective investigations into all known Soviet-era State crimes, identify all those responsible and, if possible, bring them to justice;
- (u) Increase the amounts of compensation due to the victims of Soviet-era persecution for arbitrary deprivation of liberty and expropriation of property;
- (v) Expedite the creation of an official database of all victims of Soviet-era persecution;

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

(a) Provide financial, logistical, and professional support to independent historians, NGOs, civil society activists, and other history producers working on issues of historical memory in Russia;

(b) Grant priority to applications, complaints or other

(d) Engage in consultations with the Russian authorities with a view to reducing infringement of freedom of expression and other human rights of independent historians, NGOs, and other civil society activists working on issues of historical memory in Russia;

(e) Reiterate calls on Russian authorities to commemorate victims of communist totalitarianism; to cease the persecution of history producers,

RIGHTS VIOLATED AS PART OF A STATE POLICY TO TARGET HISTORY PRODUCERS

submissions to international bodies, including the European Court of Human Rights, the Human Rights Committee, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council, lodged by independent historians, NGOs, and other civil society activists working on issues of historical memory in Russia;

(c) Urge the Russian authorities to respect the rights of independent historians, NGOs, and other civil society activists working on issues of historical memory;

(f) Include historians and history producers in the classification of Human Rights Defenders where pursuing their work is fraught with consequences of the kind detailed in this report; and

(g) Promote the establishment of a UNESCO "Day of Historians," and other similar initiatives recognizing the importance of the profession of historians and the search for historical truth.

CONTACTS

www.fidh.org

17, passage de la Main d'Or 75011 Paris - France

Tel: (33-1) 43 55 25 18

Twitter: @fidh_en / fidh_fr / fidh_es

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/FIDH.HumanRights/>