

Russia: Police Raid in the Voronezh Human Rights House

Members of the Civic Solidarity Platform condemn the December 19 raid by plain-clothed Russian police on the premises of the Human Rights House-Voronezh. Coming on the heels of the adoption of a number of repressive laws that restrict the ability of Russian activists to carry out their legitimate work, these searches represent another clear case of the misuse of state power to harass human rights defenders. Civic Solidarity calls on the international community to speak out against this and other cases of harassment and to insist that the Russian government puts an end to such actions.

The police officers who carried out the search on Wednesday refused to identify themselves or present a search warrant. Not only did they search the premises, but they also forcibly removed Victoria Gromova, director of the Youth Human Rights Movement, from one of the offices; confiscated the phone of another activist, Lubov' Zakharova of the human rights news agency Article20, while she was commenting on the events; locked a number of activists in one of the rooms; and refused to allow an attorney into the building. They confiscated two private computers, two hard disks and USB drives.

This was the second raid of the day in Voronezh. Earlier in the morning police officers from the anti-extremism department and investigators from Moscow began searches at the homes of activists including human rights defender Natalia Zvyagina, representative of the Interregional Human Rights Group Voronezh/Black Earth and Transparency International, as well as the Public Monitoring Commission. The official pretext was the investigation of the high-profile case of opposition activists Sergei Udaltsov, Leonid Razvozhayev and Konstantin Lebedev who are accused of «plotting mass disorders».

The Human Rights House-Voronezh brings together a number of well-known human rights groups including: the international Youth Human Rights Movement, a Civic Solidarity Platform member with Council of Europe participative status; the Interregional Human Rights Group; regional representations of Memorial and “Golos”; the Civil Initiative “Green Alternative” and the regional representation of Transparency International-Russia. Among other groups with offices in this building are the Union of Professional Writers, the Centre for Civic Initiatives, the “Confederation of Free Labour” trade union organization, the Interregional Free Student Union, and Lawyers for Labour Rights. The building also hosts the personal office of Andrey Yurov, head of the International Observation Mission of the Committee of International Control (CIC) over the Human Rights Situation in Belarus and recently selected member of the presidential Human Rights Council, and the private cabinet of attorney Olga Gnezdilova.

We, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, express solidarity with our colleagues from the International Youth Human Rights Movement and the other human rights groups targeted by the raids in Voronezh. We appeal to Russia’s international partners to stand by Russian civil society as it faces growing pressure and to hold the Russian government accountable to its international obligations to protect human rights defenders.

Albanian Helsinki Committee (Albania)

Article 19 (United Kingdom)

Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement (Ukraine)

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (Bulgaria)

Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Centre for National and International Studies (Azerbaijan)

Crude Accountability (United States)

Foundation for Regional Initiatives (Ukraine)

Freedom Files (Russia)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (Georgia)

Helsinki Committee on Human Rights in Serbia (Serbia)

Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)

Kharkiv Regional Foundation "Public Alternative" (Ukraine)

Helsinki Citizen's Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)

Helsinki Committee of Armenia (Armenia)

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)

Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)

Institute for Reporters, Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)

Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)

Index on Censorship (United Kingdom)

International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)

Legal Transformation Centre (Belarus)

Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)

Netherlands Helsinki Committee (the Netherlands)

Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)

Nota Bene (Tajikistan)

People in Need (Czech Republic)

Promo LEX Association (Moldova)

Public Verdict (Russia)

Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)

United Against Racism (Netherlands)