



10 March 2020

## Urgent Call for Immediate Release of Prisoner of Conscience Yulia Tsvetkova

The right to free expression is enshrined in the Russian constitution, yet the authorities have curtailed this right with restrictive legislation, making it difficult for artists and activists to share their opinions, ideas, and creativity without fear of reprisal. The free flow of ideas and expression of opinion are hallmarks of an open and free society. The Russian government, however, has fallen drastically short of this ideal. Artists and filmmakers have been prosecuted and harassed for their works, as [reported](#) by the Danish NGO Freemuse. Activists have been detained and silenced for speaking out and mobilising people to act in defense of human rights. Watchdog groups report an increasingly difficult environment for civil society and growing risks for activists in the country, as documented in Freedom House's 2020 Freedom in the World [analysis](#) of Russia.

Prominent LGBTI+ and feminist activist in Russia's Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Yulia Tsvetkova, known for her illustrations, activism and theatre work, is one such individual to face severe backlash from the authorities, including fines under the country's controversial 'gay propaganda' law<sup>1</sup>. Now with a [criminal investigation](#) initiated against her, she could, if charged and convicted on charges of pornography (Criminal Code article 242.3), be sentenced to up to six years in prison. Arbitrary use of such articles to fine and prosecute people expressing support for or belonging to the LGBTI+ community is cause for concern, such as in the 2019 case of the transgender woman Michelle, [sentenced](#) to three years on pornography charges.

Tsvetkova has reported persecutions and harassment as a result of her activism, drama, and artistic activities. This most recent case against her was initiated in October 2019 and she has been under house arrest since 22 November. The charges against her are widely believed to be fraudulent and an attempt to silence her voice and artistic expression, which she has used to speak out on equality, gender identity and a positive body image. [Memorial Human Rights Center](#) and [Amnesty International](#) have named Tsvetkova a prisoner of conscience and called for her immediate release. The terms of her current house arrest expire on 22 March.

We are concerned over the reprehensible [reports](#) that she is being denied access to health care for chronic pain she is experiencing. There have also been reports of Tsvetkova receiving [threats](#) from the notorious hate group Pila's death list, where the late activist Elena Grigoryevas was also named before she was brutally murdered in St. Petersburg in 2019.

Given the concerns over Tsvetkova's health, the threats against her, and the violations of her right to free expression, we the undersigned:

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Law No. 135-FZ of 2013, on Amendments to Article 5 of the Federal Law "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development"

- **Demand** Tsvetkova's immediate and unconditional release from house arrest, and that all charges under article 242.3 and the so-called propaganda legislation be revoked.
- **Urge** the police to investigate the threats against the activist and to hold those groups and individuals accountable.
- **Call on** the Russian authorities at all levels of decision-making power to refrain from arbitrarily using Criminal Code article 242.3 to curtail people's opinions, ideas and identity, and that the so-called "gay propaganda law"<sup>2</sup> be repealed.

### **Signatories**

Civil Rights Defenders

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Freemuse

Amnesty International Norway

FRI - Norwegian Organisation for Sexual and Gender Diversity

Human Rights House Foundation

International Partnership for Human Rights

Queer World

Salam Norway

Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights

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<sup>2</sup> Federal Law No. 135-FZ of 2013, on Amendments to Article 5 of the Federal Law "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development"