



Statement on the Expulsion of Vanessa Kogan from Russia

On 2 December 2020, Russian immigration authorities revoked the residence permit of our colleague, human right lawyer and director of Justice Initiative Project, Vanessa Kogan. The revocation was made on the spurious grounds that Kogan “poses a threat to national security of the Russian Federation.” Kogan has been given two weeks to leave Russia. The undersigned organizations regard the expulsion of Kogan as retaliation for her sterling human rights work and urge the Russian authorities to immediately annul this decision.

Justice Initiative Project is a group of legal entities and human rights lawyers based mainly in Russia dedicated to addressing impunity for grave human rights violations and gender-based violence in the post-Soviet region. In Russia, the group has worked extensively in the North Caucasus region, where victims of human rights violations have had no access to justice or reparations. Over the years, the group’s lawyers have provided legal aid to thousands of people seeking justice for human rights violations, including abductions and enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture, and gender-based violence. The organisation is one of the most active in Russia in bringing cases to the European Court of Human Rights, with over 250 judgements issued in favor of the complainants. Many of those judgements, such as those concerning enforced disappearances and domestic violence, have set important precedent for the whole region. Justice Initiative Project has always been open and transparent about its work.

The decision to revoke Vanessa Kogan’s residence permit in retaliation for her work, violates many of her rights, including her right to family life as well as her rights to freedom of association and expression. Vanessa Kogan, a US citizen, has lived in Russia for the past 11 years. Her spouse and children are Russian citizens and reside in Russia. The expulsion of Kogan will lead to disruption of their family life and, in the situation of the restrictions imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, may result in a lengthy family separation.

Kogan’s departure from Russia will entail a disruption to the organization’s normal operations, because she is also the director of one of Justice Initiative’s main constituent entities in Moscow, NGO “Astreya”. Astreya will be left in administrative limbo and more vulnerable to

attacks from the authorities. Ultimately this creates a real risk that access to the European Court of Human Rights for the Justice Initiative's current and potential clients will be obstructed.

The expulsion of Kogan will serve a double blow to the work of the Justice Initiative as Kogan's husband Grigor Avetisyan is also a human rights lawyer and an integral part of the organization, coordinating its work on implementation of judgments and international advocacy.

We are convinced that Vanessa Kogan's work does not pose a threat to national security. On the contrary, her work has been important for contributing to the advancement of human rights, rule of law and social change through the restoration of the rights of victims of human rights violations.

The reprisals faced by Vanessa Kogan are yet another example of how human rights defenders in Russia are being targeted and harassed by the authorities. It also provides a good illustration of the witch-hunt waged by the Russian authorities against international cooperation, solidarity and support in human rights work.

This is not the first case in which Russian authorities have pushed foreign national human rights defenders out of the country. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the expulsion from Russia on identical grounds of Jennifer Gaspar was a violation of her family life. Before her residence permit was wrongly annulled, Gaspar, a human rights activist, lived in St. Petersburg with her husband, a prominent Russian human rights lawyer, and their child.

We regard the revoking of Vanessa Kogan's residence permit as an unacceptable example of the wider practice of targeting human rights defenders. We call upon the Russian immigration authorities to immediately restore Kogan's residence permit and ensure that she can continue with her human rights work without fear of reprisals.

Amnesty International

Civil Rights Defenders

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights Watch

International Partnership for Human Rights

Norwegian Helsinki Committee