

20 May 2016

Russian Federation – Judicial harassment of human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko

Human rights defender Ms **Valentina Cherevatenko** was interrogated at the 7th Investigation Department in Rostov-on-Don on 6 May 2016 and subsequently on 10 May 2016 as part of a preliminary inquiry into the alleged violation of the Foreign Agent Law under article 330.1 of the Criminal Code for “malicious evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent”. Should an investigation be opened, it would be the first case of the criminal prosecution of a human rights defender under the Foreign Agent Law, voted into Russian Law in 2012.

[Valentina Cherevatenko](#) is the Chair of the Coordination Council of the **Women of the Don Union** and Chair of the Board of the **Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development**. The Women of the Don Union works on the rights of women in the North Caucasus including on issues of violence against women, gender discrimination and on peace building initiatives. The Union works to “promote dialogue and tolerance between different sectors of society” and also provides regional clinics on social and legal issues.

The preliminary investigation was opened on the basis of alleged violations of the Foreign Agent Law by both organisations. According to the widely criticised Federal Law №121-FZ “On Introducing Changes to Certain Pieces of Legislation of the Russian Federation as Regards Regulation of Activities of Non-Commercial Organisations Performing the Functions of Foreign Agents”, otherwise known as the “Foreign Agent law”, any NGO that receives funding from abroad must register as a “foreign agent” if it engages in any kind of vaguely defined political activity, including advocacy and human rights work. The Criminal Code was also amended with article 330.1 which states that “malicious evasion of the duty to file the documents required for inclusion in the register of non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent” can be punishable to up to 2 years’ imprisonment.

The Women of the Don Union was recognised as a foreign agent in 2014 and the Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development in 2015. Both were added to the Foreign Agents register compiled by the Ministry of Justice. Both organisations however have refused to accept this label and challenged their listing in the register and related fines in civil and administrative proceedings. While the appeal is pending, both organisations have operated in full compliance with the Foreign Agent Law in all aspects such as by submitting reports and audits. On 29 February 2016, the Ministry removed the Women of Don Union from the register, as the organisation is no longer “carried out functions of a “foreign agent”.

Front Line Defenders is concerned by the judicial harassment and possible criminal charges against human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko which it believes to be directly linked to her peaceful and legitimate work on *inter alia* women's rights in Russia. Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern for the enactment of the Federal Law №121-FZ, “On Introducing Changes to Certain Pieces of

Legislation of the Russian Federation as Regards Regulation of Activities of Non-Commercial Organisations Performing the Functions of Foreign Agents” and the significant negative influence that this law has on the work of human rights defenders in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Russia to:

1. Immediately cease all further judicial harassment of Valentina Cherevatenko, as Front Line Defenders believes that this is solely as a result of her legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Repeal the Federal Law №121-FZ, “On Introducing Changes to Certain Pieces of Legislation of the Russian Federation as Regards Regulation of Activities of Non-Commercial Organisations Performing the Functions of Foreign Agents”;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.