

10 October 2016

Russian Federation - IHRS Memorial classified as ‘foreign agent’

On 4 October 2016, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation issued a pronouncement to add the **International Historical and Human Rights Society (IHRS) ‘Memorial’** to a registry of non-commercial organisations functioning as ‘a foreign agents’.

[The International Historical and Human Rights Society ‘Memorial’](#) is an association of human rights initiatives that was founded in 1989 with an aim to preserve the societal memory of the severe political persecution in the past and modern time in the former Soviet Republics. Memorial conducts research and engages in educational activities, monitoring and documentation of human rights violations, social and legal counselling for refugees, displaced persons, political prisoners and their families, and other discriminated groups. In recognition of its human rights work, Memorial was awarded with the Victor Gollancz Prize, the Hermann Kesten Prize, the Pax Christi International award and Max van der Stoel Award, among others. In 2006-2011 Memorial was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The General Prosecutor’s Office, which initiated an examination of the organisation in September 2016, came to the conclusion that Memorial has been receiving foreign funds and found evidence of ‘political activity’ in the work of the organisation. Memorial considers the Ministry’s decision to be unlawful and intends to appeal it in accordance with the standard of the Administrative Procedure Rules of the Russian Federation.

The so-called Russian ‘Foreign Agents’ Law, which went into effect on 21 November 2012, requires non-governmental organisations that conduct ‘political activities’ and receive funding from abroad to register with the Ministry of Justice as ‘foreign agents’. However, the definition of ‘political activities’, in accordance with an amendment accepted by the Russian Parliament in May 2016, includes almost any research or advocacy activities that criticizes or challenges the Russian government or its policies. The national human rights community claims that the law is of a discriminatory nature and does not rely upon the supremacy of the law. The community considers the law as a means for Russian authorities to discredit, penalise or impede the work of non-governmental organisations, especially those working to promote or protect human rights, to observe elections and fight for transparency of the state authorities.

Front Line Defenders expresses its grave concern at the classification of Memorial as ‘a foreign agent’, which it believes to be an attempt to prevent the organisation from continuing its legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights in the former Soviet Republics.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in the Russian Federation to:

1. Remove the International Historical and Human Rights Society ‘Memorial’ from the registry of ‘Foreign Agents’;

2. Immediately cease all further harassment and targeting of 'Memorial';

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.