

6 June 2017

## **Russian Federation: Valentina Cherevatenko faces criminal charges under the Foreign Agent Law**

On 2 June 2017, the Investigative Committee of the city of Rostov-on-Don brought false charges against the human rights defender, **Valentina Cherevatenko**, 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”. This is the first case of criminal prosecution of a human rights defender under this article for the alleged violation of the Foreign Agent Law, adopted in Russia in 2012.

[Valentina Cherevatenko](#) is 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, which has goals identical to those of the Foundation, works on peace building initiatives in the North Caucasus, promoting “dialogue and tolerance between different sectors of society” and organising clinics on social and legal issues. It is also involved in the protection of women's rights in the region, concentrating its work on combating violence against women and gender discrimination.

On 2 June 2017, Valentina Cherevatenko was summoned by the Investigative Committee of Rostov-on-Don city, and was formally charged with “malicious evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent” under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The indictment results from a criminal investigation initiated against Valentina Cherevatenko by the Investigative Committee on 27 June 2016. Prior to opening the criminal investigation against her, on 24 June 2016, the Federal Security Service and police officers searched the offices of the Women of the Don Union and Foundation with a court order and confiscated all of the organisations’ documents and equipment. Previously, on 10 and 6 May 2016, Valentina Cherevatenko was interrogated at the 7th Investigation Department in Rostov-on-Don as part of a preliminary inquiry under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code.

In the indictment, the human rights defender is accused of having criminal intent to violate the Foreign Agent Law when she established the Women of the Don Foundation in August 2013. It is stated in the decision that Valentina Cherevatenko knew about the involvement of the Foundation in “political activity” and that it was receiving foreign funding, but did not apply to register the organisation as a “foreign agent”.

The so-called ‘Foreign Agents’ Law’, which was introduced 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.’ The definition of ‘political activities’, in accordance with an amendment accepted by the Russian Parliament in May 2016, includes almost any research or advocacy that criticises or challenges the Russian government or its policies. The law is used by Russian authorities to discredit, penalise, or impede the work of non-governmental organisations, especially those working to promote or protect human rights, observe elections, and fight for transparency of the state authorities.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern over the judicial harassment of human rights defender,

Valentina Cherevatenko, as it believes that she is being targeted as a result of her legitimate work in defence of human rights.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Russia to:**

1. Immediately drop all charges against **Valentina Cherevatenko** and cease all further judicial harassment of the human rights defender;
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 the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.