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21 June 2023

**Belarus: Belarusian Association of Journalists’ website, social media and logo declared
“extremist”**

On 13 June 2023, Belarusian authorities added the website, social media accounts and logo of the human rights organisation the **Belarusian Association of Journalists** (BAJ) to the Republican List of Extremist Content. Being on the list of extremist content exposes those people who somehow engage with the BAJ’s website, social media or logo to risks of administrative persecution, ranging from fines to 15 days of detention. Earlier this year, in February 2023, the Committee for State Security (KGB) of Belarus labelled the BAJ as an “extremist organization”.

The [Belarusian Association of Journalists](#) (BAJ) was set up as a Belarus-based association of journalists, media workers, and media outlets that work to protect and promote freedom of speech, freedom of information, and the rights of journalists and the media in Belarus. Since its establishment in 1995, the human rights organisation has monitored violations of freedom of expression, including those committed during the presidential elections in 2020. On 27 August 2021, the Supreme Court of Belarus revoked the BAJ’s license to operate, but it continues its operation without a license outside of Belarus as a human rights organisation in exile. The BAJ’s work has been internationally recognised with prizes and awards, including the PACE’s Sakharov Prize in 2004; Atlantic Council’s Freedom Award in 2011; and the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize in 2022.

On 13 June 2023, the BAJ announced that Belarusian authorities had added the organisation’s website, social media accounts and logo to the Republican List of Extremist Content. According to Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Republic of Belarus, distribution, storage, production, or transportation of products recognised as “extremist materials” is an administrative offence, thus subjecting various persons to risks of persecution. The types of persecution range from financial penalties of varied amounts (up to EUR 5,000) to administrative arrests of up to 15 days. Law enforcement authorities are also authorised to seize the so-called weapon of the crime, ranging from phones and laptops to essentially anything that has the BAJ’s logo on it.

On 7 March 2023, the KGB included the BAJ on the “list of organisations involved in extremist activities.” The Belarusian authorities noted that a group of BAJ representatives, including the head of the BAJ, Andrey Bastunets, his deputies Aliaksandr Starikevich, Alina Surovets, Barys Hahetskii and Aleh Aheev, and journalists Zoya Lukashuk, Siarhey Komlach and Volha Khvoin, carried out extremist activities. The authorities did not specify what exactly qualifies as extremist activities.

On 28 February 2023, the Belarusian KGB listed the BAJ as an extremist organisation. There is currently a roster of 121 organisations involved in extremist activities in Belarus, including the

human rights organisation EcoHome, the human rights media outlet Nasha Niva, and many other civil society organisations.

Since the mass protests that took place after the presidential elections in August 2020 in Belarus, the national authorities have been systemically targeting human rights defenders and organisations with reprisals on an unprecedented scale, limiting almost all possibilities for in-country human rights work. More recently, the country's authorities have targeted human rights organisations as "extremists", potentially exposing anyone engaging with such organisations to fines and detentions.

Front Line Defenders condemns the continued discrediting of the human rights organisation the Belarusian Association of Journalists, as it believes it to be a reprisal against its legitimate and non-violent human rights work. Front Line Defenders urges the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally stop using anti-terrorism and security laws to justify the persecution of human rights defenders and organisations.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities in Belarus to:

1. Immediately de-list the BAJ's logo, website and social media platforms from the Republican List of Extremist Content;
2. Cease the judicial harassment of the BAJ and other Belarusian human rights organisations through anti-terrorism and security laws;
3. Refrain from using anti-terrorism and security laws to target human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers, and their respective human rights organisations;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all journalists and human rights defenders in Belarus can carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Belarus' international human rights obligations and commitments.