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16 February 2024

Urgent Appeal – Crimea (Ukraine): Human rights defender and lawyer Emil Kurbedinov targeted for a social media post.

On February 15, 2024, the Russian occupational law enforcement authorities from the Center for Combating Extremism in Simferopol, Crimea, drew up an administrative report against Crimean human rights defender and lawyer Emil Kurbedinov for so-called “abuse of freedom of mass information,” a crime, envisioned by Part 9, Article 13.15 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation. If found guilty, the human rights defender will face a fine up to RUR 100,000 (approximately EUR 1,000) and a confiscation of the “tool of the administrative offence.”

[Emil Kurbedinov](#) is a prominent human rights defender and lawyer in Russian-occupied Crimea, Ukraine. Since the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in February-March 2014, he has been actively involved in the defense of the rights of Crimean Tatars who became a targeted group, along with civil society activists and journalists. He provides people with legal aid, observes searches at activists’ homes, and uses social media and international conferences to bring public attention to human rights violations in Crimea. [Emil Kurbedinov](#) was the winner of the 2017 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

On February 15, 2024, the Russian occupational authorities from the Center for Combating Extremism in Simferopol, Crimea, approached Emil Kurbedinov, when he was exiting the building of the Crimean Investigative Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Simferopol. In 20 minutes the law enforcement officers drew up an administrative report against the human rights defender, targeting him for the social media post that he authored in the Telegram channel “KEMs’ka Volost” on July 14, 2023. In this post, he shared legal advice on how students, who could be targeted by the Russian de-facto authorities in Crimea with forced conscription, can avoid compulsory military service. The occupational authorities told Emil Kurbedinov that they were tipped off to the post by one of the pro-Russian activists in Crimea; they accused the human rights defender of the so-called “abuse of freedom of mass information,” a crime, envisioned by Part 9, Article 13.15 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation.

This is not the first attempt to impede the work of the human rights lawyer in Russia-occupied Crimea. In 2017 and 2018, [Emil Kurbedinov](#) was sentenced to [ten](#) and [five days](#) of administrative arrest on charges of “public distribution of extremist materials”. Both charges concerned the same social media post in 2013, that displayed symbols of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which he posted on different social media sites. Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned in Russia as a terrorist organization, however, it operates legally in Ukraine. Shortly after his release, Emil Kurbedinov and the Bar Association of Crimea received a letter from Russia’s Ministry of Justice requesting to expel the lawyer from the bar association. The Bar Association of Crimea considered the possibility of excluding Emil Kurbedinov from the list of its founders and members but decided to maintain his membership after

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establishing a special commission for this purpose. The targeting and systemic persecution of human rights lawyers by the Russian authorities form part of a worrying trend in Crimea since its annexation and illegal occupation in 2014.

Front Line Defenders condemns the continued targeting of human rights defender and lawyer Emil Kurbedinov for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. The organization continues to raise its concern with the pattern of Russia authorities on using of “censorship laws” to persecute human rights defenders and lawyers in Crimea.

Front Line Defenders urges the Russian de-facto authorities in Crimea to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally stop administrative harassment against human rights defender and lawyer Emil Kurbedinov;
2. Seize using the growing amount of “censorship laws” to silence peaceful and legitimate human rights work of human rights defenders and lawyers in Crimea;
3. Abide by the international human rights obligations incumbent upon them along with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers by respecting the independence of lawyers to freely practice without suffering judicial or administrative harassment and without endangering their livelihoods;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Crimea are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.