

20 June 2019

Russia: Five criminal cases opened against director of Ecodefense Aleksandra Korolyova

On 19 June 2019, the environmental rights organisation “**Ecodefense**” issued a public statement on the five criminal cases opened against its director **Aleksandra Korolyova** on charges of “malicious failure to comply with a court order”. The charges are linked to the organisation’s non-compliance with the discriminatory requirements of the “foreign agents law”.

[Aleksandra Korolyova](#) is an environmental rights defender, the co-founder and the current director of Ecodefense, one of the oldest environmental rights organisations in Russia. Ecodefense works in Moscow, Kaliningrad and Kuzbass to protect the right to a clean and healthy environment, mitigate the negative impacts of coal mining, nuclear power plants and nuclear waste import, as well as to provide environmental education.

On 30 May 2019, an investigator of the Federal Bailiffs Service in Kaliningrad opened five criminal cases against the director of Ecodefense Aleksandra Korolyova on charges of “malicious failure to comply with a court order”. Three of the cases are linked to the unpaid administrative fines that the organisation was issued with due to its “failure to provide information of an NGO performing the functions of a foreign agent”. The other two cases were opened as a result of the organisation’s failure to pay the administrative fines for not submitting reports to the Ministry of Justice as required by the “foreign agents law”. According to the investigator, paying the administrative fines is part of Aleksandra Korolyova’s official duties as the organisation’s director. The offence of “malicious failure to comply with a court order” is punishable with up to two years in prison. The human rights defender had to leave the country and is currently seeking asylum in a foreign state.

In July 2014, the Ministry of Justice registered Ecodefense as a foreign agent after its successful campaign against the construction of a nuclear power plant in the Kaliningrad Region. Ecodefense refused to comply with the discriminatory requirements towards organisations labelled as foreign agents, as its members believed that this status had been wrongly assigned to their organisation. Ecodefense is currently appealing the decision of the Ministry of Justice at the European Court of Human Rights.

The “foreign agents law” entered into force on 20 November 2012, introducing a number of restrictive amendments to the Law on Non-commercial Organisations. According to these amendments, the status of a “foreign agent” should be assigned to organisations receiving funding from abroad and participating in any political activities. A number of human rights organisations have been registered as “foreign agents”, which has significantly limited their activities due to a number of discriminatory requirements, such as additional reporting and obligatory references to the “foreign agent” status in any public documents.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the five criminal cases opened against the director of Ecodefense Aleksandra Korolyova as they are believed to be a direct result of the organisation’s peaceful and legitimate work on the protection of environmental

rights. Front Line Defenders is also worried about the continuous use of the “foreign agents law” to curtail the peaceful and legitimate activities of human rights organisations in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Aleksandra Korolyova and lift the administrative fines issued against Ecodefense, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by the organisation’s legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Lift the foreign agent status assigned to Ecodefense and review the “foreign agents law”, as it imposes discriminatory obligations on human rights organisations, effectively limiting their peaceful and legitimate activities;
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, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”*, and to Article 13: *“everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means, in accordance with article 3 of the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director