

19 October 2021

## **Russia: Public event of International Memorial attacked by mob and members and attendees unlawfully detained by police**

On 14 October 2021, a group of between 20 and 25 unknown individuals broke into the office of the **International Historical and Human Rights Society Memorial (International Memorial)** in Moscow, interrupting a movie screening. When police officers arrived at the scene, they claimed that the screening was “unsanctioned” and blocked the office, leaving dozens of people unlawfully detained inside the building for hours.

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

On 14 October 2021, International Memorial hosted a public screening of the movie “Mr. Johnes” by Polish director Agnieszka Holland as a part of a Documentary Film Festival “Documentary Environment.” At approximately 7:30 PM, thirty minutes into the event, a violent mob of around 25 individuals unlawfully entered the premises, mounted the stage, and began yelling offensive slurs in an attempt to start a fight with the human rights defenders and other audience members. The Russian pro-governmental media outlet “NTV,” infamous for their smear campaigns against human rights defenders and oppositional leaders in Russia, were also at the scene to cover the situation.

In response, members of International Memorial called the police. However, before the police officers arrived the majority of the mob managed to escape. The police officers, the majority of whom failed to formally identify themselves, prohibited both staff of International Memorial as well as attendees from leaving the premises. The police officers reportedly blocked the entrance doors from the outside using handcuffs and were physically violent toward some attendees. Instead of detaining members of the mob that remained on-site, the police officers accused International Memorial of hosting an unsanctioned event.

The police officers forced all staff of International Memorial to provide written explanations of the events of the evening, including their personal details and conviction records. The staff and attendees remained in de facto unlawful detention for 5 hours. The police officers could not provide a warrant explaining the reasons behind this detention and refused to answer any questions put to them by those being detained. Until midnight, the police did not allow lawyers who arrived on site to provide legal support to International Memorial to enter the premises. At midnight, the police officers started extracting the CCTV equipment, leaving the building with no security. The raid lasted for more than 5 hours and those detained were released after midnight, on 15 October 2021.

Front Line Defenders believes the recent attack against International Memorial is part of a general crackdown on civil society in Russia and expresses grave concerns about the assault and subsequent unlawful detention of International Memorial's staff and visitors due to the organisation's continuous non-violent human rights work. Front Line Defenders calls upon Russian Authorities to conduct a timely and transparent investigation into both the actions of the mob and the actions of the law enforcement officers, identifying perpetrators and bringing them to justice.

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

1. Carry out an impartial and thorough investigation into the attack against and subsequent arbitrary detention of members of International Memorial with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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 your attention to Article 5: "*For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully*" (b) *To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups* (c) *To communicate with non-governmental or intergovernmental organizations*" and to Article 12 (1 and 2): "*(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (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, threats, 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.*"