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Russia: Art exhibition at the office the Human Rights Project *Open Space* shut down, volunteer's apartment raided.

On 14 June 2022, a group of vigilantes from the Russian Liberation Movement, SERB, attacked an art exhibition *Autonomous Zone* in the Moscow office of the human rights project ***Open Space***. SERB representatives reported the exhibition to the police. The law enforcement officers who arrived on site shut down the exhibition and confiscated the exhibited artworks, alongside posters and stickers from the *Open Space* office as part of a preliminary investigation for the “public discredit of the actions of the Russian Federation armed forces” an offence under Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation. Following the events, on June 16, at midnight, law enforcement officers raided the apartment of *Open Space* volunteer Daria Soboleva, who was present on site at the time of attack.

The [*Open Space*](#) human rights project has, over the years, united like-minded activists from across Russian cities through project spaces in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The project involves community centres for activists which offers a space for open communication and collaboration. *Open Space* coordinates various projects, including projects that offer support to political prisoners and their families in Russia. *Open Space* provides a safe space for human rights defenders and grassroots activists to host events and receive psychological and emergency support if facing persecution. The first *Open Space* opened its doors in 2012 in Saint Petersburg, the second in Moscow in 2021.

On 12 June 2022, the human rights project *Open Space* opened its exhibition *Autonomous Zone* in Moscow. The art exhibited is authored by those who are or have been recently detained in detention centres and temporary isolation wards because of their political and anti-war positions, and included various artworks and testimonies that reflected politically-motivated detention.

On 14 June 2022, police and an investigator came to the Moscow office of the human rights project *Open Space*. One of the leaders of SERB arrived also and made a number of complaints to the police who were present about the exhibition and the space itself. Upon arrival to the site, the law enforcement officers confiscated the displayed artworks. The SERB activists insisted that the police also confiscate anti-war stickers from the walls, an LGBTI-themed publication, and old posters with photos of political prisoners that the *Open Space* stored for the “Mothers against Political Repressions” group.

The law enforcement officers told an *Open Space* volunteer that they confiscated artworks and other paraphernalia as part of a preliminary investigation into *Open Space* allegedly committing “public actions aimed at discrediting operations of the Russian Armed Forces that protect the interests of Russia and its citizens and maintain world peace and security” as per Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Civic Conduct of the Russian Federation, and “insulting a government official” as per Article 319 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The *Open Space* reported that it is unclear who will face the charges: the authors of the artworks, the exhibition organisers, or the *Open Space* itself.

After the raid, the police officers took the *Open Space* volunteer who was present, Daria Soboleva, accompanied by an attorney, in for questioning at the Basmany Police Precinct. When Daria Soboleva refused to testify against herself, invoking Article 51 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the law enforcement officers refused to let her go before she spoke. Later that evening,

Daria was released after not conceding any information. On June 16, at midnight, law enforcement officers from the Criminal Investigation Department raided Daria Soboleva's apartments. The raid was sanctioned due to an opened criminal case against an unidentified person, for vandalism carried out by a group of people, motivated by political, ideological, or other type of hate (part 2, Article 214 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). The raid finished around 2 am, with no personal items being seized.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the forced closure of the art exhibition at the premises of the human rights project *Open Space* and the raid of its volunteer's apartment. Front Line Defenders believes that the *Open Space* is being solely targeted as a result of their legitimate and non-violent human rights work as well as their anti-war position. Front Line Defenders expresses its grave concern regarding the systematic targeting of human rights organisations for "discrediting of the Russian armed forces," as it disproportionately targets human rights defenders and has a chilling effect on civic liberties in Russia and silences human rights voices in the country.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the Russian authorities to:

1. Cease persecution of the *Open Space* human rights project for its legitimate and non-violent human rights work;
2. repeal the law targeting Russian citizens for the so-called "public discredit of the actions of the Russian Federation armed forces" (Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation) and "public circulation of fake information on the deployment of the Russian army and the state bodies' execution of its powers" (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), as these laws are being disproportionately used against human rights defenders and groups;
3. guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.