

16 August 2019

Russian Federation – Search of Moscow and Nazran offices of Justice Initiative project

On 16 August 2019, the Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the North Caucasus Federal District conducted a search at the office of the **Justice Initiative** project in Nazran, Ingushetia. Two days earlier, on 14 August 2019, the Moscow office of the Justice Initiative was raided by the Federal Security Service and the Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR).

The **Justice Initiative** project is dedicated to the legal protection of victims of human rights violations connected to armed conflict and counter-terrorism operations, torture and gender-based violence in the post-Soviet region. It seeks to ensure that victims of abuses have access to effective legal remedies on the domestic level, and utilise international mechanisms, including the European Court of Human Rights, when domestic remedies are inadequate.

On 16 August 2019, staff of the Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the North Caucasus Federal District conducted a search at the Nazran office of the project Justice Initiative. The head of the office, Magomet Barakhoev, sent a short voice message about the search to his colleagues in Moscow before the connection with the office employees was lost. The search ended after seven hours and the Justice initiative's documentation for the years 2017 – 2019 was seized, including agreements with lawyers on ECHR cases.

On 15 August 2019, the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the North Caucasus Federal District issued a decree stating that "As a result of measures taken to identify persons involved in the unrest that took place on 27 July 2019 and 3 August 2019 in Moscow, it was established that one of the organisers of the unauthorised protest rallies is an unidentified group of persons who are the coordinators of the activities of autonomous non-profit organisations and public associations located on the territory of the North Caucasus Federal District that receive foreign funding. The indicated group of persons may be involved in organising and conducting unauthorised protests and rallies in the North Caucasus region, accompanied by riots, and also, using the opportunities of non-profit organisations, from the funds received from abroad, can finance the above-mentioned illegal actions and extremist actions in order to destabilise the socio-political situation in the region." Despite the vague wording, the decree also identifies the address of the office of the Justice Initiative, and gave the authorities the mandate for the raids.

Justice Initiative has not been working on any of the cases connected to the Moscow events in July-August 2019 mentioned above, however, the office in Nazran works on the cases of seven detainees during protests in Ingushetia in March 2019. In August 2019, lawyers sent an appeal to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association in connection with the disproportionate criminal prosecution of rally participants in Ingushetia.

On 14 August 2019, the Moscow office of the Justice Initiative was raided by the Federal Security Service and the Special Rapid Response Unit (SOBR). The officers were armed with machine guns and, without presenting a search warrant, began to examine the cabinets of the Justice Initiative. They took the human rights defenders' phones for one hour and demanded access to the phones. Employees were forced to unlock the screens and officers read their correspondence in instant messengers. They photographed the employee's passports and tried to open the office of the director of the organisation. The officers claimed to have a search warrant for "the entire building". After approximately one hour, they moved to the office of a neighbouring organisation, working in the field of auditing. No documents of the Justice Initiative were seized.

DUBLIN

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
Second Floor, Grattan House
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the searches of the offices of the Justice Initiative which seems to be an attempt of intimidation solely motivated by the organisation's peaceful and legitimate work defending human rights in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:

1. Return the documents confiscated during the raid, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;
2. Repeal the decree issued by the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the North Caucasus Federal District on 15 August 2019, falsely implying a connection between the Justice Initiative project and protests and extremist activities;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Russia and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.