

20 September 2019

Russian Federation: Search in the house of human rights defender Semyon Simonov

On 12 September 2019, police conducted a search in the house of human rights defender and lawyer **Semyon Simonov** in Sochi. Documents of the Southern Human Rights Centre and digital devices of the human rights defender were seized during the search.

Human rights defender [Semyon Simonov](#) works on minority rights, raises awareness about human rights and civil rights, police accountability, criminal justice, and supports civic initiatives and non-profit organisations. Semyon Simonov is the head of the **Southern Human Rights Centre**, a regional organisation in Russia that provides free legal assistance to victims of human rights violations, organises educational and awareness-raising events and supports other civic initiatives and NGOs.

On 12 September 2019, an interrogator, a district police officer, a patrol service squad, a brigade of the Ministry of Emergency Situations, an employee of a trust company, a specialist of Rostelecom, and two witnesses came to the house of Semyon Simonov. Employees of the Ministry of Emergency Situations broke the lock on the door of Semyon Simonov's apartment, and the police carried out a search that lasted for more than four hours. Reports and protocols of the Southern Human Rights Centre, which have already been submitted to the state institutions by the organisation, were seized and sealed in plastic bags together with several notebooks, hard drives, CDs and USB-drives.

After the search, Semyon Simonov was brought to the Police Department of the Department of the Interior in the Central District of Sochi. The interrogation was postponed to the following day when he insisted on the presence of his lawyer before answering any question.

On 13 September 2019, Semyon Simonov and his spouse Taisia Simonova, a psychologist who works with people from vulnerable groups, were interrogated as witnesses in the presence of their lawyer. Semyon Simonov refused to testify. On the same day, Semyon Simonov's mother, who lives in the Voronezh region, and another member of the Southern Human Rights Centre in Sochi were also interrogated.

A criminal case was initiated under Art. 327 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on the charge of "falsification of a meeting protocol of the Southern Human Rights Centre by unidentified persons". The police claims that the protocol about the change of legal address was falsified one year ago. Art. 327 carries a minimum sentence of two years of restriction of freedom.

Simonov has been previously subjected to detentions, administrative fines, pressure from law enforcement agencies and smear campaigns on the media. The Federal Security Service has put him on the list of "persons under special control". The Southern Human Rights Centre has been included in the list of "foreign agents", and its bank accounts have been previously blocked.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned at the search of Semyon Simonov's house and believes that the constant pressure on the human rights defender is aimed discouraging him from carrying out his legitimate human rights work in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:

1. Immediately close the case initiated under Art. 327, as it is believed to be solely motivated by the Southern Human Rights Centre's legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Immediately cease all further harassment of Semyon Simonov and his family members;
3. Return all items and documents confiscated during the search, as they are manifestly not linked to any criminal activity;
4. 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.