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## Russia: Continued harassment of environmental rights organisation Ecodefense!

On 13 March 2020, human rights defender and co-chair of **Ecodefense!** Vladimir Sliviyak was detained during a protest against coal mining in Novokuznetsk and held at a police station for half an hour. On the same day, police stopped a bus with participants of a press tour on coal mining organised by Ecodefense! and held it up for an hour near Novokuznetsk without providing any explanation. This is not the first time Ecodefense! has been targeted for its peaceful human rights activities.

[Ecodefense!](#) is one of the oldest environmental rights organisations in Russia. With offices in Moscow, Kaliningrad, Yekaterinburg and Vilnius, it works 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 and increase citizen participation through environmental campaigns and direct non-violent actions.

Between 11 and 13 March 2020, Ecodefense! organised a press tour for Russian and German journalists to highlight the environmental consequences of coal mining. The participants visited locations in southern Kuzbass affected by coal mining, and met with local anti-mining activists. On 13 March 2020, Vladimir Sliviyak from Ecodefense! and Arshak Makichyan from Fridays for Future held solo pickets at the entrance to the Federal Agency for Subsoil Management in Novokuznetsk, which issues coal mining licenses. Through the picket, Ecodefense! sought to draw attention to the negative impacts of open-pit coal mining in Kuzbass, the largest coal basin in Russia, on public health. Several journalists who participated in the press tour were also present on site as they intended to cover the pickets. Vladimir Sliviyak was detained by the police during the protest and held at a local police station for half an hour. According to the police, the defender was detained to help draft a description of the protest. After Vladimir Sliviyak was released and returned to the hotel along with Arshak Makichyan and press tour participants, they encountered police officers who were asking the hotel reception about them.

Later that day, the press tour participants were travelling by bus to the village of Chuvashka to meet with representatives of the indigenous Shors people. They were stopped while exiting Novokuznetsk by the police, including the officers who had previously come to the hotel. They requested documents from the bus driver and one of the journalists, accusing him of conducting journalistic activities without a license. For an hour, the police refused to return the documents and held up the bus on the outskirts of Novokuznetsk without providing any explanation. During this time, one of the police officers was receiving instructions from his supervisor over the phone. An hour later, after articles and videos on the harassment of Ecodefense! started appearing on various news websites, the police let the press tour participants continue their journey. As reported by human rights defenders from Ecodefense!, police officers in plain clothes had followed them on 11 and 12 March.

In 2014, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation placed Ecodefense! on the government's register of "foreign agents" for failure to comply with the requirements of the "foreign agents law". The organisation was subsequently fined 1.1 million RUB (approximately 13,000 euros). In June 2019, the Federal Bailiff Service [opened five criminal cases](#) against the director of Ecodefense! Alexandra Korolyova for failure to pay the administrative fines imposed on the organisation. The human rights defender had to leave Russia and received refugee status in Germany. In January 2020, the Moscow District Court in Kaliningrad cancelled one of the fines, amounting to 100 000

RUB (1,235 euros), imposed on Ecodefense! for non-compliance with the discriminatory requirements of the “foreign agents law”.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the continued harassment and intimidation of the human rights organisation Ecodefense! and its employees, which it believes is aimed at curtailing the organisation’s peaceful and legitimate human rights activities in Russia.

**Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:**

1. Immediately cease all further harassment of Ecodefense! and its employees, as it is believed to be solely motivated by the organisation’s peaceful human rights activities;
2. Lift the remaining administrative fines and the foreign agent status imposed on 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 and organisations 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.

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