

19 November 2019

## Russia: People in Need declared an “undesirable organisation”

On 12 November 2019, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation placed **People in Need** on the government's list of “undesirable organisations”. The Prague based international human rights and humanitarian organisation was included in the list of “undesirable foreign and international non-governmental organisations on the territory of the Russian Federation” based on the decision of the Russian Deputy Prosecutor General on 7 November 2019, who gave no grounds for the decision.

[People in Need](#) is a non-governmental, non-profit humanitarian organisation based in Prague. It provides emergency aid to people in need in the event of a natural disaster or wartime crisis, and offers long-term support for people living in poverty and poor conditions. People in Need has human rights programs focused on supporting civil society in repressive states and countries undergoing democratic transition, including in the Russian Federation. In particular, People in Need was one of the international human rights NGOs which provided the inhabitants of the North Caucasus with humanitarian aid and support during the second Russian-Chechen war.

As a result of being declared “undesirable” in Russia, People in Need is forced to cease its activities in the country to avoid heavy sanctions, jail sentences and putting its partners at risk. This a move further isolates Russian human rights organisations, which already face restrictive legislation and restricted space in which to legally carry out their work. As a result of this decision, Russian human rights advocates have been cut off from an important international source of support, funding and advocacy. In addition, the collaboration with People in Need as with any “undesirable organisation” may lead to the criminal prosecution of Russian citizens.

The Russian law on “undesirable organisations” came into force in 2015, establishing administrative and criminal liability for “undesirable” international organisations, their executive officers and persons associated with such organisations. The law gives the Prosecutor General the power to declare “undesirable” any foreign or international non-governmental organisation that “represents a threat to constitutional rule, national defence capacity or national security”, and to ban its activity on Russian territory, punishing individuals who collaborate with them. The grounds for declaring an organisation “undesirable” are formulated in extremely broad terms, making its arbitrary application possible. The individuals who “cooperate” with an organisation declared “undesirable” will be subject to an administrative fine. This “cooperation” will become a criminal offence if committed by a person who has been held responsible for similar actions under administrative law at least twice during the previous year.

Since 2015, nineteen international organisations have been declared “undesirable”, including the National Endowment for Democracy, Civil Society Institute and Civil Society Foundation, The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Open Russia Foundation, Ukrainian World Congress, etc.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by Russian Ministry of Justice’s non transparent decision to place human rights organisation People in Need on the government's list of “undesirable organisations”. Front Line Defenders strongly believes that Russian law on “undesirable organisations” is employed arbitrarily against international organisations and is aimed at suppressing human rights activities in Russia.

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

1. Remove People in Need from the government's list of “undesirable organisations”, as it believes the organisation is being targeted solely as a result of its legitimate and peaceful activities in the defence of human rights in Russia;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights organisations in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment and criminalisation.