

10 January 2019

## **Ukraine: Risk of disbarment of human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov**

On 10 January 2019, Crimean human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov received a letter from the Crimean Directorate of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation notifying him that he will be excluded from the Crimean Bar Association before 1 March 2019.

Emil Kurbedinov is an outspoken human rights lawyer in Crimea. Since the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, he has been actively involved in the defence of the rights of Crimean Tatars who became a targeted group, along with civil society activists and journalists. He provides people with legal aid, observes searches at activists' homes and uses social media and international conferences to bring public attention to human rights violations in Crimea. Emil Kurbedinov is a recipient of the 2017 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

On 10 January 2019, Emil Kurbedinov received a letter (dated 18 December 2018) from the Crimean Directorate of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation notifying him that according to 1.2 (4) of Article 15 of the Federal Law “On non-commercial organisations”, a person that has been convicted of extremism cannot be a founder or a member of non-commercial organisation. Emil Kurbedinov is founder and member of Crimean Bar Association. The letter refers to two administrative convictions of Emil Kurbedinov for a post that he published on two of his social media accounts.

On 7 December 2018, Kievsky District Court of Simferopol condemned Emil Kurbedinov to five days of administrative detention under Article 20.3 of the Administrative code of the Russian Federation for his 2013 social media post on Facebook which, according to the court, displayed “symbols of the terrorist organisation Hizb-ut Tahrir”.

On 26 January 2017, Emil Kurbedinov was sentenced to 10 days' detention for publishing the same post on the social network Vkontakte. Emil Kurbedinov did not contest the fact that in 2013 he reported on the “Hizb-ut Tahrir” demonstrations, which took place in Crimea. Under Ukrainian law, “Hizb-ut Tahrir” was not a forbidden organisation. The Russian Supreme Court designated it a terrorist organisation in 2003.

The letter from the Crimean Directorate of the Ministry of Justice orders Emil Kurbedinov to comply with 1.2 (4) of Article 15 of the Federal Law before 1 March 2019. He has committed to appealing the order.

Front Line Defenders would like to draw attention to the fact that this requirement is exceptional for a member of a bar association, which cannot be considered a simple non-commercial organisation. Until now, similar demands have applied only to those who had a criminal conviction.

Front Line Defenders believes that two administrative convictions of Emil Kurbedinov related to events that took place before Russian occupation of the peninsula are used to disbar Emil Kurbedinov, which appears to be a clear reprisal for his vocal position against ongoing human rights violations in Crimea.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Russia to:**

1. Withdraw the planned exclusion of Emil Kurbedinov from the Crimean Bar Association;
2. Immediately cease all further forms of judicial harassment against Emil Kurbedinov; Abide by the international human rights obligations incumbent upon them along with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers by respecting the independence of lawyers to freely practice without suffering judicial or administrative harassment and without endangering their livelihoods;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Crimea are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.