

9 June 2017

Russian Federation: Office of human rights organisation Russia Behind Bars searched

On 8 June 2017, four officers of the Department for Economic Security and Combating Corruption of the Ministry of Interior and two cadets of the Federal Investigative Committee conducted a search in the office of human rights organisation Russia Behind Bars, based on false accusations that the organisation had been involved in the ‘embezzlement of public funds’.

[Russia Behind Bars](#) is a human rights organisation which provides legal assistance and raises funds for prisoners and their families. It also monitors prison conditions and reveals cases of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners throughout Russia.

On the morning of 8 June 2017, four officers of the Department for Economic Security and Combating Corruption and two persons presented as “civil society representatives”, but revealed by members of Russia Behind Bars to be cadets of the Federal Investigative Committee, entered the office of Russia Behind Bars to conduct a search as part of a public investigation into information they received from an unspecified source that the organisation was involved in the ‘embezzlement of public funds’. This accusation is contradicted by the fact that Russia Behind Bars has never received state funding, which suggests that the search took place in retaliation at the organisation’s work on reforming the prison system and providing legal education for prisoners and their families in the Russian Federation. The leaders of Russia Behind Bars stated that their work on these issues causes confrontations between the organisation and the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation who fails to meet their obligation to bring prison conditions in Russia in line with international legal standards.

During the search, which lasted for three hours, all employees of Russia Behind Bars were confined to the office and deprived of any means of communicating with the outside world. Following the search, Russia Behind Bars produced certified copies of all required documents and reported that no electronic equipment had been checked or taken.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the search of the human rights organisation, Russia Behind Bars, as it believes it is being targeted as a result of its legitimate work in defence of human rights in the Russian Federation.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Cease all further forms of harassment against the human rights organisation, Russia Behind Bars, as it is believed these measures are related to its legitimate human rights activities;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.