

9 September 2024

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council

Excellency,

We, the undersigned organisations, urge your delegation to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation during the 57th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). Since the last resolution at the 54th session, the human rights situation in Russia has continued to deteriorate rapidly and profoundly, marked by alarming new developments that further underscore the urgent and fundamental need for this mandate.

The death in custody of prominent opposition leader Alexey Navalny on 16 February 2024 is among the grave developments in this period. Navalny died under suspicious circumstances – he had been subjected to inhumane treatment in prison, including denial of adequate healthcare and prolonged solitary confinement, which led to his deteriorating health. Russian authorities have refused to allow an independent investigation into his death. At a time when arbitrary arrests, unfounded prosecution and imprisonment of government critics have escalated, Navalny's death is a stark reminder of the dangers faced by dissenters and highlights the urgent need for international oversight and accountability, particularly concerning the use of torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

Russian authorities increasingly use vague counter-extremism and counter-terrorism legislation arbitrarily to target dissenters and peaceful protesters, including those opposing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, under the guise of "national security". This has also compounded the dire challenges facing marginalised minority groups in Russia. In November 2023, the Russian Supreme Court designated the "international LGBT movement" as an extremist organisation. This ruling was followed by the inclusion of this "movement" on a government list of extremist groups in early 2024. This designation has led to the prosecution of individuals for acts as simple as displaying rainbow flags or wearing rainbow-coloured accessories, with some facing fines, detention, and even criminal charges. Additionally, numerous LGBT organisations, including legal and community centres, were forced to shut down, and LGBT-related gatherings have been subjected to police raids.

Similarly, Indigenous organisations have faced intensified repression. In July 2024, the Russian government labelled dozens of Indigenous rights organisations as "extremist," citing their alleged involvement in a so-called "Anti-Russian Separatist Movement." The targeted groups include the Aborigin-Forum and the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR), which have been crucial in advocating for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the face of state and corporate exploitation. Many of the proceedings involving terrorism, extremism or high treason are closed to the public.

Freedom of expression remains severely limited with hundreds of people being prosecuted, including under so-called "war censorship" laws. Independent media has been all but driven out of the country. Further repressive measures have targeted journalists, human rights defenders, civic activists, and independent lawyers in exile and those remaining in the country. This must be seen alongside the forced dissolution of many civil society organisations. Online censorship is becoming ever more severe, with restriction of access to YouTube and the secure instant messenger Signal amid a crackdown on VPN services.

In recent months, the Russian government has escalated its campaign of repression by expanding the scope of so-called "foreign agent" legislation, leading to the addition of more individuals and organisations to the "foreign agent" registry, further restricting their rights and further criminalisation of dissent. The Russian authorities have also expanded the scope of the law on "undesirable organisations", which can now target any foreign organisation and trigger criminal charges against anyone in Russia who cooperates with them. The register of "undesirable organisations" is constantly being expanded. In recent months, at least two people were convicted on criminal charges for involvement with "undesirable" organisations, and at least seven new cases were opened, including one against a human rights defender.

Draft amendments to the law "On Advocacy and the Legal Profession", currently pending before the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, would - *de jure* and *de facto* - further limit the capacity of lawyers to work

independently in their profession, and seriously further undermine due process guarantees and the right to a fair trial, leaving little space for effective legal defence and access to justice in politically-motivated trials.

Given the severity of the repression, the closure of civic space, and the continued targeting of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, peaceful protesters - including children - and others, the role of the Special Rapporteur remains critical. Since her appointment, the current mandate holder has provided an essential lifeline for Russian civil society, offering an authoritative and independent appraisal of the human rights situation. The Special Rapporteur's work has become even more vital as Russia moves to isolate itself further from international scrutiny.

We call on your delegation to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Russia for a further year at the 57th session, and to provide the mandate-holder with all the resources necessary to fulfil this challenging and increasingly urgent role. This extension is crucial to allow for continued rigorous monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in Russia, and to ensure that the voices of those who continue to struggle for their rights in hostile conditions are heard.

Respectfully,

- Amnesty International
- ARTICLE 19
- Board of the Civil Society Forum
- CIVICUS
- Freedom House
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Human Rights Watch
- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- Society for Threatened Peoples, Germany
- Stichting Justice Initiative
- World Organisation against Torture