

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION: ATTACK ON MEMORIAL'S OFFICE FOLLOWED BY POLICE RAID

In the evening of 14 October 2021, the office of the NGO International Memorial in Moscow was intruded by a violent mob and then, effectively raided by police who subjected those inside to unlawful detention and questioning lasting several hours.

On 14 October, starting at 7 pm, International Memorial in cooperation with Polish Cultural Center was conducting a screening of a film *Mr Jones* by Polish film director Agnieszka Holland. The film tells the story of a British journalist Gareth Jones who first depicted Holodomor, the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine instigated by the Soviet government's policies that resulted in the death of millions of people.

The screening was disrupted by the arrival of an aggressive mob of about 30 people. Video recordings from Memorial's office show some of them getting onto the stage and shouting "Shame on you!", "Fascists!" and other insults while others were accosting members of the audience. According to an eyewitness, the mob came together with a reporter and several cameramen from the pro-Kremlin TV station NTV, infamous for its "documentaries" smearing the work of human rights defenders and other civil society activists. The intruders refused to leave the premises and Memorial staff called the police.

By the time the police arrived, most of the intruders had left the building, but three were still inside. On arrival, the police detained them, photographed their passports and took them away. The police were from Tverskoye police station. Given this, and the location of the incident and the applicable rules and practice, the intruders would be ordinarily delivered to the Tverskoye police station and face administrative or criminal proceedings. However, Memorial staff members who simultaneously went to the same police station to provide information about the attack and file their written complaints did not see the intruders being delivered there, despite spending around an hour and a half at the station. It appears that the detained intruders had been simply released by the police.

In the meantime, according to the evidence published on social media and accounts of those inside Memorial's office, the police used handcuffs to lock its doors and refused to allow anyone leave the premises. For instance, OVD-Info posted a video documenting how the police used physical force to prevent one man from leaving the building. Effectively, the event organizers and the audience were subjected to unlawful detention, which lasted over five hours, until after the midnight.

Meanwhile, the police officers inspected the premises and subjected those present to a very intrusive questioning. In particular, the police wanted to know how those who attended the screening had found out about it, and whether they had criminal records, amongst other details. Those who refused to answer these questions and referred to their constitutional right not to testify against themselves, faced open threats from the police.

The police raid and unlawful detention of those present by the police lasted over five hours. During most of this time, the police refused to let inside the lawyers who had come to provide legal advice for those detained. The police seized part of the Memorial's burglar and fire alarm equipment (the value of which as evidence for the investigation of the incident is questionable). Amongst other things, this rendered the systems ineffective and left the organization more vulnerable to further attacks and the entire building (which is partly residential) at risk of undetected fire.

The circumstances of the attack against Memorial's office, including the fact that the assailants were accompanied by a pro-government TV crew, and the subsequent actions by the police, including unlawful deprivation of liberty of those present, suggest that this was a planned and coordinated action against Memorial in connection with its independent human rights work, the latest in a series of reprisals undertaken or spearheaded by the Russian authorities against human rights and other civil society activists.

Amnesty International urges the Russian authorities to impartially and effectively investigate the events of the night at Memorial's office, identify those responsible for the attack and bring them to account in fair trial proceedings, along with the police officers responsible for unlawful detention and other violations of human rights of Memorial's staff and audience.