2 March 2022   EUR 46/5335/2022

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

Excellency,

Russian Federation: The Human Rights Council should take urgent action to address the dire human rights situation in Russia

As the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council gets underway, and Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, we, the undersigned civil society organisations, would like to draw your attention to the dire human rights situation within the Russian Federation, and urge all states to bring this neglected country situation onto the agenda of the Human Rights Council.

A year after last year’s joint statement on the situation in Russia, authorities there have further intensified the already unprecedented crackdown on human rights. A fully-fledged witch hunt against independent groups, human rights defenders, media outlets and journalists, and political opposition, is decimating civil society and forcing many into exile.

The gravity of this human rights crisis has been demonstrated in the last few days by the forcible dispersal of anti-war rallies and pickets across Russia with over 6,800 arrested (as of 2 March 2022), attempts to impose censorship on the reporting of the conflict in Ukraine and to silence those media and individuals who speak out against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, including through blocking media websites, threats of criminal prosecution under “fake news” and “high treason” charges and other means.

In a shocking development, the authorities moved to shut down “Memorial,” one of the country’s most authoritative human rights organizations. At the end of December, courts ruled to “liquidate” the group’s key legal entities, International Memorial Society and Human Rights Center Memorial, over alleged persistent noncompliance with the repressive legislation on “foreign agents.” On 28 February, the Supreme Court upheld this decision, despite an article 39 ruling from the European Court of Human Rights ordering the Russian authorities to halt liquidation proceedings.

The December rulings came at the end of a particularly terrible year for human rights in the country, during which authorities threw top opposition figure Alexei Navalny in prison, banned three organizations affiliated with him as “extremist,” launched criminal proceedings against several of his close associates, doubled down on Internet censorship, and designated more than 100 journalists and activists as “media-foreign agents”.

Recent months also saw a dramatic escalation of repression in Chechnya, where Russian law and international human rights obligations have been emptied of meaning. With the Kremlin’s tolerance or acquiescence, the local governor, Ramzan Kadyrov has been eviscerating all forms of dissent in Chechnya, often using collective punishment. In December 2021, Kadyrov opened a brutal offensive against his critics in the Chechen diaspora, by having the police arbitrarily detain dozens of their Chechnya-based relatives. It continued in January with the abduction and arbitrary detention on fabricated charges of Zarema Musaeva, mother of human rights lawyer Abubakar Yangulbaev, and death threats issued against the Yangulbaev family and some prominent human rights defenders and journalists.

This is a country situation urgently requiring the Council’s attention. We urge the Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution expressing serious concern about the human rights violations and abuses occurring in Russia, requesting the High Commissioner to monitor and report on the situation, and appointing a dedicated Special Rapporteur to address the human rights situation in Russia.

Yours sincerely,

Signed:

1. Human Rights Watch
2. Amnesty International
3. Human Rights House Foundation
4. International Federation for Human Rights
5. International Service for Human Rights
6. Human Rights Centre Memorial (Russia)
7. Civic Assistance Committee (Russia)
8. Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
9. Norwegian Helsinki Committee