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Ukraine's new charter for oppression

Repressive legislation passed at record speed without discussion in the Ukrainian parliament, must be immediately repealed, Amnesty International said today.

The new laws passed on 16 January will suffocate freedom of speech and the right to peaceful protests. It paves the way for the prosecution of journalists and civil society activists and the closure of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), internet news sites and religious organizations.

"In passing this law the government is halting any progress Ukraine has made over the past twenty years towards full compliance with its international human rights obligations. It promises a grim future for the entire nation," said Heather McGill, Amnesty International's expert on Ukraine.

All NGOs receiving foreign funding and engaging in broadly defined "political activities" are obliged to register as foreign agents or risk closure.

"The changes to the Law on Public Organizations are an almost exact copy of Russian legislation concerning "foreign agents" which has had a devastating effect on civil society in Russia," said Heather McGill.

The law reintroduces the crime of defamation, meaning that journalists who publish critical material about officials risk criminal prosecution. Harsh penalties for revealing information about law-enforcement officers and judges are introduced.

Freedom of expression is further threatened by new rules requiring all websites publishing news to register, and internet service providers are required to cut off internet access to groups and individuals on the government's direct request.

The vaguely defined crime of "extremist activity" which includes attacks on the "untouchability" of the state and interference with the work government agencies could be used to prosecute protestors advocating governmental change or demonstrating outside official buildings. The government gains greater powers to close down religious organizations.

Changes to the Administrative Code stiffen all penalties relating to the violation of regulations for public assemblies, and give the police greater powers to control how demonstrations are conducted. The law requires the introduction of new regulations for the conduct of public assemblies and harsh penalties for any infringements.

"The new legislation is tailor made to give the authorities increased powers to prosecute those involved in the ongoing peaceful anti-government protests in central Kyiv. It shows that the government is clearly not interested in dialogue, or ready to hear criticism, but is paving the way for head-on confrontation with a large part of the population of the country," said Heather McGill.

See also:

[Ukraine: Repressive legislation threatens freedom of expression, assembly and association](#)

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