

URGENT ACTION

RIGHTS DEFENDER FACING CRIMINAL PROSECUTION

Prominent human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko has been repeatedly summoned by an investigator and may become the first to be criminally prosecuted under the “foreign agents law”. If convicted, she could face up to two years in prison.

Valentina Cherevatenko, the founder and chair of the prominent Russian NGO, **Women of the Don Union**, was summoned on 6 May, and again on 10 May, for questioning by the Seventh Investigation Directorate of the Investigative Committee. This unit is tasked with investigating “crimes of great public resonance”, such as those resulting in numerous deaths or most serious crimes committed by state officials. Her summons are part of official proceedings that precede the opening of a criminal case under the charges of “systematic evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent” (Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code). If prosecuted and convicted, Valentina Cherevatenko may face up to two years in prison.

Women of the Don Union, and its sister organization Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development (where Valentina Cherevatenko is a member of the board), were declared “foreign agents” by the Ministry of Justice on 27 October 2015. The so-called “foreign agents law” compels Russian NGOs to register as “organisations performing the functions of foreign agents” if they receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined “political activities”. The law requires NGOs declared “foreign agents” to mark all their public materials with this label and imposes on them additional reporting and other onerous requirements. Both NGOs dutifully fulfilled all these requirements. On 29 February 2016 the Ministry of Justice officially removed Women of the Don Union from the “foreign agents” register.

Since the enactment of the “foreign agents law” in 2012 numerous NGOs have been facing intrusive inspections by the authorities and been having to deal with arduous court proceedings. Over a hundred NGOs have been included in the “foreign agents” register. However, this is the first case of an NGO leader being criminally prosecuted under the “foreign agents law” which will create a dangerous precedent.

Valentina Cherevatenko and other members of Women of the Don Union have long faced harassment in connection with their human rights work and outspoken criticism of human rights violations committed by the Russian authorities.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Urging the Russian authorities to immediately end any proceedings and attempts to open a criminal case against Valentina Cherevatenko for violation of the “foreign agents law”;
- Calling on them to stop the harassment of Valentina Cherevatenko and any members of the NGOs Women of the Don Union and Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development;
- Reminding them of their responsibility to ensure human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate activities free of harassment and without fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 AUGUST 2016 TO:

Prosecutor of Rostov Region
Yuri Alekseevich Baranov
Prosecutor's Office of Rostov Region
Per.Khalturinskiy, 101
Rostov-on-Don 344011
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 863 210 5599 8 (if voice answers, ask for "Fax")
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation
Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 5841/ +7 495 692 1725
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Head of Investigation Directorate for Rostov Region
Yuri Vasilievich Popov
Investigative Committee
Ul. Moskovskaya, 51/15
344002 Rostov-on-Don,
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 863 227 0193
Salutation: Dear Head of Investigation Directorate

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Women of the Don Union has worked tirelessly for over 20 years on a range of issues, from human rights to humanitarian relief and peacebuilding, in Rostov Oblast and the neighbouring regions, including in the North Caucasus. It is one of the most highly regarded and authoritative NGOs in Russia.

Both Women of the Don Union and Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development have challenged their inclusion in the “foreign agents” register by the Ministry of Justice. On 29 February 2016 the Ministry of Justice officially removed one of them, Women of the Don Union, from the register because stating that the organisation “had stopped performing the functions of a foreign agent”.

The “foreign agents law” was passed in 2012 as part of the Russian authorities’ crackdown on the right to freedom of association in the country. When the law was adopted, Article 330.1 was inserted in the Criminal Code in 2012. It introduced the crime of “systematic evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent”, for which there are severe penalties, ranging from heavy fines to two-year imprisonment for NGO leaders.

The introduction of this law has had a chilling effect on many organisations and civil society activists in Russia. Its aggressive implementation by the authorities has resulted in a number of prominent NGOs choosing to close down, several more facing bankruptcy for refusing to brand themselves “foreign agents” and being issued with heavy fines, and has disrupted the normal work on hundreds of NGOs across Russia. The attempt to instigate criminal proceedings against Valentina Cherevatenko creates a dangerous precedent and takes the clampdown against independent civil society in Russia a whole step further.

Name: Valentina Cherevatenko
Gender m/f: f

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