

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

28 February 2022 EUR 46/5272/2022

# RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AUTHORITIES IMPOSE CENSORSHIP ON MEDIA AND CRUSH PEACEFUL ANTI-WAR PROTESTS FOLLOWING INVASION OF UKRAINE

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Russian official media watchdog Roskomnadzor issued a statement effectively ordering all media that cover the developments of the invasion (officially termed "special operation of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine") to use "information and data received only from official Russian sources". The agency effectively prohibited the distribution of information obtained from any other sources and threatened those reporting or commenting on the invasion with sanctions for "spreading knowingly false information". These include fines of up to RUB 5 million (US\$ 62,600) and blocking of online platforms that post reports or comments.<sup>1</sup>

This statement is nothing less than an open act of censorship intended to silence any form of opposition against the invasion. It is also a blatant violation of Russia's international human rights obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The right to freedom of expression and access to information is especially vital in times of crisis and armed conflict. Amnesty International is calling on Roskomnadzor to immediately withdraw its statement and rescind its threats against those commenting or reporting on the current crisis. The organization further urges Roskomnadzor to work together with other relevant Russian authorities to ensure unobstructed exchange of information and ideas, including by guaranteeing the safety of journalists and other media workers.

The Russian authorities must also ensure that anybody who would like to protest peacefully against the invasion of Ukraine, either through staging single person pickets or by organizing peaceful demonstrations, is not prevented from or prosecuted for doing so. Amnesty International is concerned that following the call for a peaceful protest against the invasion of Ukraine announced by civil society activists for the evening of 24 February in Moscow, the Russian Investigation Committee (a stand-alone government agency responsible for investigating serious crimes), the police authorities and the Moscow Prosecutor's Office issued statements warning against "unauthorized protests" that could lead to the "serious sanctions" including criminal prosecution and imprisonment of protesters and organizers.<sup>2</sup> According to reports by the human rights organization OVD-Info, over 5,900 peaceful protesters have been arrested since the start of the invasion, including those staging single person pickets, in at least 67 cities and towns across Russia. Media outlets reported that some of those arrests were carried out through the use of unnecessary and excessive force by the police, confirmed by available video evidence and numerous eyewitness accounts.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all those peaceful protesters who have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights, and for all the charges against them to be dropped. The organization is further calling on the Russian authorities to ensure that all those who wish to exercise their right to organize and to participate in peaceful assemblies can do so without fear of violence or other reprisals.

<sup>1</sup> <https://rkn.gov.ru/news/rsoc/news74084.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sledcom.ru/news/item/1659180/> ; [https://epp.genproc.gov.ru/web/proc\\_77/mass-media/news?item=71993787](https://epp.genproc.gov.ru/web/proc_77/mass-media/news?item=71993787)