

Court decision to liquidate Memorial in Russia: joint statement

Mr. Chairman,

I give this statement on behalf of Canada, Iceland, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and my own country Norway.

We are deeply disturbed by the Russian courts' decision to forcibly dissolve International Memorial and the Memorial Human Rights Centre.

Memorial is one of Russia's oldest and most reputable human rights organisations. For more than thirty years they have worked tirelessly to uncover the facts about the political oppression during Soviet times and commemorate the victims of political terror. The organisation is uniquely competent and capable of calling out methods of state repression and their effort to promote civil society and democratic principles in modern day Russia is invaluable.

The arbitrary use of the laws on anti-extremism, so-called "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" allows the Russian authorities to not only shut down civil society organisations, but also pursue individuals associated with them, spreading fear and uncertainty among their members. This practice must end.

The NGO OVD-Info, also labelled a so-called "foreign agent", provides legal assistance to citizens under administrative or criminal prosecution for exercising their right to freedom of speech, in addition to advocacy on the right to freedom of assembly. Media regulator Roskomnadzor's move to block the website of OVD-Info and demand their social media accounts be removed is another example of the harassment and persecution endured by Russian civil society and is an act of state censorship.

We are also deeply disturbed by the continued imprisonment of Yuri Dmitriev. As a local leader of Karelia Memorial and a respected historian, he has dedicated himself to human rights work and research on political repression in the Soviet period. His verdict of 15 years imprisonment on a strict regime is based on spurious charges. We see his imprisonment as a politically motivated response to his research. We call for Mr. Dmitriev's immediate and unconditional release.

We urge Russian authorities to adhere to the European Court of Human Rights' interim measure and suspend the decision to dissolve Memorial until this court has considered the case.

Furthermore, we urge Russian authorities to cease their attempted decimation of Russian civil society and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Russia's citizens, in line with Russia's OSCE and other international human rights commitments.

Thank you