

URGENT ACTION

RUSSIAN NGOS FACE NEW FORM OF PERSECUTION

A Moscow court has fined a Russian NGO almost 10,000 USD. It is the first organization to be fined under a repressive new law which requires organizations in receipt of foreign funding and engaged in "political activities" to describe themselves as "foreign agents".

On 9 April the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation initiated proceedings against the election-monitoring organization **GOLOS** and its Director, Lilia Shibanova. According to the prosecution, the organization violated a law introduced in 2012 which requires organizations in receipt of foreign funding to describe themselves as "foreign agents" if they engage in undefined "political activities". On 25 April a Moscow court fined GOLOS 300,000 roubles (almost 10,000 USD) while Lilia Shibanova was fined 100,000 roubles.

GOLOS played a prominent role in organizing election monitoring and reporting allegations of electoral fraud during the 2011 parliamentary and the 2012 presidential elections. The Ministry of Justice claimed that GOLOS' advocacy for the adoption of a unified Electoral Code sought to "influence public opinion and decisions of government bodies". The authorities also accused GOLOS of receiving approximately 10,000 USD in prize money after being presented the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. GOLOS instructed its bank to return the sum and stated that they did not use the money. GOLOS insists that they do not receive foreign funds.

The case against GOLOS sets a new precedent for the persecution of other NGOs and civil society activists in the Russian Federation. The "Foreign Agents" law imposes restrictions on freedom of association that are inconsistent with international human rights standards. On 16 April, a similar case was brought against the **Kostroma Regional Centre for Support of Public Initiatives** following an inspection by the prosecutor's office. The prosecutors claimed that the organization of a roundtable discussion on US-Russia relations attended by a US diplomat amounts to political activity. At least 12 other NGOs have received official warnings from the prosecutor's office.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Urging the Russian authorities to review the cases against GOLOS and the Kostroma Regional Centre for Support of Public Initiatives and to drop all charges;
- Urging them to respect the right to freedom of association and expression and to stop the persecution of civil society and human rights activists and intervention in their lawful activities;
- Urging them to repeal the provisions of Federal Law no.212 FZ requiring NGOs engaged in "political activities" and in receipt of foreign funding to register and publicly describe themselves as "foreign agents".

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 JUNE 2013 TO:

Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Konovalov
Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation
ul. Zhitnaya, d.14
119991 Moscow GSP-1
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 955 57 79
Email: pr@minjust.ru
Salutation: Dear Minister

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 58 41
(if a voice answers say "FAX" clearly)
Email: prgenproc@gov.ru
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation
Sergei Yevgenievich Naryshkin
State Duma of the Russian Federation
ul. Okhotny Ryad 1
Moscow 103265
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 697 42 58
Email: stateduma@duma.gov.ru

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

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

**AMNESTY
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 21 July 2012, President Putin signed into force a law imposing an obligation for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) receiving overseas funding and involved in “political activities” to register as “foreign agents”. Nowhere does Russian law clearly define what constitute “political activities.” The law also requires foreign-funded NGOs to submit quarterly information about the purpose of their expenditure and the use of other assets; to submit a twice-yearly report detailing their activities and the persons composing its governing bodies; and to annually undergo a financial audit. The law also obliges NGOs to display the label “foreign agent” on their websites and publications. Failure to abide by this new regulation is punishable by fines of up to 300,000 roubles (almost 10,000 USD), suspension of activities of the NGO in question and a prison sentence of up to two years for its leadership.

The term “foreign agent” carries negative connotations in Russian (it is closely associated with “spy”). The new requirement for NGOs receiving overseas funding to register as “foreign agents” not only puts additional administrative burdens on them, but also provides further pretext for inspections and sanctions, whilst excessively high fines threaten to undermine the vital work of Russian NGOs.

Founded in 2000, GOLOS is a non-governmental organization which aims to protect Russian voters’ rights and the development of civil society. GOLOS works in 48 regions in Russia and advocates fair, direct and transparent elections by conducting short-term and long-term election monitoring, by informing citizens about electoral legislation, managing hotlines for reports of electoral corruption and by publicly discussing important social issues.

These cases come amidst a systematic undermining and violation of the rights to freedoms of expression, assembly and association that have been the hallmark of President Putin’s human rights record during the first year of his third term as President of the Russian Federation.

For more details, see report *Freedom under threat: the clampdown on freedoms of expression, assembly and association in Russia*; <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/011/2013/en>

Name: GOLOS (both) Lilia Shibanova (f)

Gender m/f: both

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