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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Yakutia - Our Opinion, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Statement on the need to open Europe for civil activists of the Russian Federation

Below is a mandatory message for foreign agents,

as required by Russian law

“THIS MESSAGE (MATERIAL)

WAS CREATED AND (OR)

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THE FUNCTIONS OF FOREIGN AGENT”

In the Russian Federation, there is a critical situation with human rights and, in particular, with the rights of those who defend them.

Currently, many independent human rights organizations and civil society activists are being subjected to unjustified and arbitrary persecution.

They are subjected to significant monetary fines, their participation in public life is restricted, law enforcement agencies carry out searches and illegal seizure of equipment, politically motivated administrative and criminal cases against them are initiated, and human rights organizations are forcibly closed.

In the Russian Federation, a massive repressive policy is being pursued against the human rights community and civil society.

State and law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation terrorize non-governmental organizations and civil society in the Russian Federation.

One of tools to suppress civil society is legislation on so-called foreign agents, adopted in violation of international law.

Foreign agents are required to account for their activities and expenses, including personal expenses, which constitute an invasion of privacy. They are also prohibited from working in state and municipal institutions. They are required to mark their materials with special text.

Foreign agents who violate their obligations face administrative liability. In case of committing three administrative violations, foreign agent is threatened with criminal liability under article 330.1 of Criminal Code. In this case, foreign agent can be sentenced to fine of 5 million rubles or even put in jail for 5 years.

Law on undesirable organizations has also been passed, which allows arbitrary prohibition of activities of international non-profit organizations, and cooperation with them can lead to criminal liability.

Negative trends have intensified in recent years.

COVID-19 laws have become a tool for suppressing protests and limiting human rights. Under the pretext of fighting the pandemic, all mass events and single pickets were banned in the Russian Federation.

Anti-Corruption Foundation and other organizations of Navalny were recognized as extremist organizations. Article 282.2 of Criminal Code provides for liability for participation in the activities of an extremist organization.

In fact, former members of Navalny's organizations can be considered as persons continuing the activities of this organization, even if they participate in a new organization that has other statutory goals. This creates a real threat of imprisonment for tens of thousands of people who have any relation to Navalny's organizations.

The situation worsened after February 24 this year.

In March, norms of the Code of Administrative Violations and the Criminal Code on responsibility for disseminating false information about the actions of the Russian military, discrediting the actions of the Russian Armed Forces and for public calls for sanctions against the Russian Federation were adopted.

According to the authorities, a citizen could face up to 15 years in prison for distribution of false information on use of the Russian Armed Forces, discrediting the Russian Armed Forces - up to 5 years, and calls for anti-Russian sanctions - up to 3 years.

As a result, a critical situation has developed in the Russian Federation, when non-governmental organizations and civil activists can be subjected to arbitrary repression and terror for political reasons at any time.

Under these conditions, a significant number of active Russian citizens made the difficult decision to leave the country.

However, currently the world has a difficult situation in the field of migration.

It has become extremely difficult for citizens of many countries, including the Russian Federation, to obtain visas, and even more so political asylum. These procedures are often complex, bureaucratic and lengthy, making it almost impossible for Russians to leave the country.

This situation requires certain measures to be taken.

International human rights organizations appeal to the states with requests to take measures to issue humanitarian visas for Russian civil activists persecuted for political reasons.

For example, Amnesty International published an appeal to the Conference of Ministers and Senators of the Federal States of Germany with a proposal to urgently develop a concept for the protection of Russian human rights defenders (1).

The organization noted the following target groups.

Firstly, these are human rights activists located in the Russian Federation.

Secondly, these are human rights activists who entered the country on a Schengen visa.

We can note the third group of Russian human rights activists who need humanitarian visas to European countries.

These are people who are in the CIS countries: the Caucasus and Central Asian regions.

Since the beginning of 2022, tens of thousands of human rights defenders have left for Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries in these regions.

In addition to human rights activists, civil activists and journalists were forced to leave the Russian Federation. They also need visa support.

The movement of human rights defenders, civil activists and journalists is carried out by non-governmental organizations.

One such project is the Rapid Response Unit project to evacuate anti-corruption activists and public figures from the Russian Federation, implemented jointly with the Russian branch of Transparency International (2).

Being in the Caucasian and Central Asian countries is a good way to relax, think on the situation and plan further actions.

For most, the path lies further to the countries of Western Europe and North America.

It should be noted that the period of visa-free stay in these countries for Russian citizens is limited. In addition, the Russians are running out of money resources. Some were forced to leave with their entire families and even their pets.

Therefore, the citizens of the Russian Federation need to arrive at their final destination as soon as possible in order to begin to equip their new life.

Tens of thousands of human rights activists, civic activists and journalists in the Russian Federation, who are forced to travel, hope to get to the countries of Western Europe, settle there and become worthy citizens of these countries.

And after stabilization of the situation in the Russian Federation, they will take part in the formation of civil society and state of law.

Their choice of Western Europe is quite logical and understandable. The period of their formation and activity fell on the years of perestroika and democratic transformations in the 1990s. These people became the bearers of Western democratic values.

Each of them made significant efforts to implement universally recognized international human rights standards, defended and promoted them over the past 30 years.

Human rights activists of the Russian Federation defended the rights of citizens, guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, in courts, state and law enforcement agencies.

Russian journalists objectively covered the events and ceased to be the mouthpiece of power, as it was in the days of the USSR.

Civil activists of the Russian Federation became real leaders, whom the people elected for deputies and elected positions.

Each of them who continue to take a principled position of adherence to democratic values, is a worthy citizen and person.

And, of course, in this difficult time, they have full moral right to be accommodated in the countries of Western Europe and North America, which are examples of democratic states of law.

These countries have come a long way, eradicating human rights violations or minimizing them to an acceptable level, and then helping other countries to form democratic systems of government.

Invaluable support was provided to the Russian Federation in the early 1990s.

With the help of developed democratic countries, the economy was liberalized and democratic institutions were created.

All this would not have been possible without the citizens of the Russian Federation, who shared the desire for a better life by Western standards.

The leading part of Russian society - human rights activists, civic activists and journalists - has become the locomotive of democratic reforms.

Unlike politicians and officials, being independent of the authorities, they proved their devotion to the people and democracy.

And they helped the Russian Federation's transition from a communist dictatorship to a modern democracy in every possible way.

However, at present the Russian Federation is going through difficult times and now they - human rights activists, civic activists and journalists in the Russian Federation - need the help of developed democratic countries.

We hope that the countries of Western Europe will take all necessary measures to accommodate Russian citizens and to integrate them into their societies.

Based on the foregoing, Non-Governmental Organization "Yakutia - Our Opinion" with Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council

urge the authorities of Western European countries to provide all possible assistance in the accommodation of human rights activists, civic activists and journalists of the Russian Federation who need humanitarian visas to European countries.

The documents of European states should provide for an individual approach to each category of Russian citizens who need humanitarian visas and who can be divided according to their actual location as follows:

- located in the Russian Federation;

- entered European countries on a Schengen visa;
- located in the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asian regions, third countries.

1. Appeal, available at:

<https://www.amnesty.de/informieren/positionspapiere/deutschland-amnesty-anliegen-zur-fruehjahrstagung-der-imk-2022>

2. The Rapid Response Unit project, available at:

<https://transparency.org.ru/projects/novosti/transperensi-podderzhit-relokacziyu-zhurnalistov-pravozashhitnikov-i-aktivistov-iz-uf>