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Statement - Russia: Ban on “international LGBT movement” will have dire impact on LGBTI rights defenders in the country

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the state-sponsored crackdown against the LGBTI movement in the Russian Federation. On 30 November 2023, during a classified hearing, Russian Supreme Court Judge Oleg Nefedov ruled in favour of the motion submitted by the Ministry of Justice which saw fit to list the “international LGBT movement” as extremist and to ban the movement within the state. The decision came into force immediately. The motion, which the Ministry of Justice submitted to the Supreme Court on 17 November 2023, states that the “international LGBT movement” should be banned as extremist, given that it “incites social and religious hatred.”

This landmark ruling exposes all LGBTI human rights defenders in Russia and beyond to the risk of a wide range of human rights violations and criminal persecution, as any LGBTI or queer organization, or any organization that seeks to promote LGBTI rights could potentially be targeted as extremist, given that the term “international LGBT movement” is not clearly defined, and is open to interpretation.

The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation stipulates that financing or participating in an extremist movement is punishable by up to 10 years in prison (as per Articles 282.2(2), 282.2(1) and 282.3) Similarly, one could face up to 15 days in detention simply for displaying symbols of a banned movement (as per Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences) and up to four years for a repeated offence (Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code). Organisations and individuals may be placed on the “registry of extremist organisations” which will result in their assets being frozen. Any human rights defender, human rights organisation, or media outlet, that promotes or even discusses LGBTI issues is a potential target and may be criminalized.

Moreover, the decision to label the whole movement as “extremist” will be used by the Russian authorities to put psychological pressure on LGBTI rights defenders, motivating them to flee the country. As soon as the decision became public, the pro-governmental telegram channels started publishing posts about the authorities preparing to launch criminal cases against LGBTI rights defenders, stating that they plan to target the most prominent human rights defenders with criminal cases, no matter whether they reside within or outside of Russia.

The Russian Federation has a history of subjecting LGBTI rights defenders to judicial harassment for their human rights activism, consistently adopting the same methods of persecuting through vaguely defined criminal offences, under the guise of safety, security, and protection concerns. Since 2012, persecution of so-called “LGBT propaganda” in Russia has been executed on a national-scale, specifically making use of Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences which, in 2012, outlawed “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors using the Internet”. Since then, a discriminatory law has also been [misused against a number of LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders](#), who were sentenced to administrative fines. On 5 December 2022, the Russian Federation officially expanded the so-called “LGBT propaganda” law to include persons of all ages; now Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences prohibits the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations and/or preferences, and sex change.”

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LGBTI rights defenders globally continue their tireless work for equality and recognition, fighting to eliminate all forms of discrimination; such groundbreaking work should be supported, not punished and banned. Human rights defenders working on issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression not only face the same threats and risks as all human rights defenders, but are also targeted simply because of their identity, including their identity as allies to the LGBTI community. Front Line Defenders condemns the use of security laws to effectively outlaw LGBTI-related human rights work in Russia. Front Line Defenders urges the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally repeal the ban of the “international LGBT movement” and to cease the persecution of LGBTI rights defenders for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.