

22 March 2016

## **Russian Federation – Harassment of human rights defender Elena Milashina**

On 16 March 2016, the Ombudsman of the Chechen Republic Mr Nurdi Nukhazhiev announced that he had requested the Investigation Committee of the Russian Federation to initiate a criminal case against human rights defender Ms Elena Milashina under Article 128.1 of the Criminal Code “Defamation”.

A press release was published on the web-site of the Ombudsman of the Chechen Republic on 16 March 2016, in which Elena Milashina was accused by the Ombudsman of "spreading false information" with respect to the Chairman of the Chechen Parliament Magomed Daudov. The Ombudsman referred to an article published by Elena Milashina in Novaya Gazeta on 10 March 2016, in which the human rights defender described an attempt by the Chechen police to abduct a member of the human rights organisation “Committee for Prevention of Torture” on 22 February 2016. Elena Milashina suggested that the abduction had been ordered by Magomed Daudov. In the press release the Ombudsman insisted that the human rights defender knew that no criminal charges had been filed against Magomed Daudov under Article 126 of the Criminal Code “Abduction”, yet presented the information in a way that led readers to believe it was the case. In light of this, the Ombudsman requested the Investigation Committee to initiate the criminal case against Elena Milashina.


Front Line Defenders is concerned by the judicial harassment of Elena Milashina, which it believes to be a clear attempt to intimidate her, directly linked to her legitimate work in the defence of human rights. The threat of legal action against her is especially worrying given the escalating situation in Chechnya and increasing harassment and attacks against human rights defenders working in the region.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Russia to:

1. Drop the initiation of legal action against Elena Milashina, and cease all further harassment of the human rights defender, as Front Line Defenders believes that the request for legal action filed by the Ombudsman of the Chechen Republic with the Investigation Committee is solely a result of her legitimate work in defence of human rights in Chechnya;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Elena Milashina;
3. Take measures to ensure that government officials and other public figures refrain from making statements or declaration stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms,”* and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor

Executive Director