

23 November 2016

Russian Federation: Human rights organisation Man and the Law investigated under counter-terrorism law

On 21 November 2016, the Yoshkar-Ola City Prosecutor's Office inspected the human rights organisation **Man and the Law** under Federal Law No. 35-FZ on Counteraction of Terrorism (2006).

[Man and the Law](#) is a regional human rights organisation based in Yoshkar-Ola in the Republic of Mari El. The organisation is involved in monitoring places of detention and in conducting investigations into human rights violations committed by government authorities, including law enforcement agencies. Man and the Law also provides legal and psychological assistance to victims of torture. Mr **Sergey Poduzov** is the Co-chairman of Man and the Law. [Sergey Poduzov](#) provides legal education for the public and strives to promote respect for human rights among government authorities throughout different outreach and legal education activities.

On 21 November 2016, inspectors of the Yoshkar-Ola City Prosecutor's Office visited Man and the Law's office to conduct an inspection of its organisational documentation, on a Public Prosecutor's order. The inspectors demanded the organisation provide them with documentation relating to the organisation's financial statements as well as to activities undertaken. The investigation was based on the Federal Law No. 35-FZ on Counteraction of Terrorism (2006).

This is not the first time that Man and the Law and Sergey Poduzov have faced judicial harassment and intimidation in retaliation to their human rights work. Over the course of the past few months, Man and the Law has been subjected to inspections by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Response, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Labour Inspection, the State Housing Control Agency, and various city authorities. All the investigations were allegedly initiated on the basis of anonymous citizens' reports against the organisation.

On 18 July 2016, the Yoshkar-Ola City Court, the Republic of Mari El, considered the administrative case against Man and Law, which had been charged under Article 19.34, Paragraph 2 of the Administrative Code, which refers to 'Violation of the operation of a non-governmental organisation functioning in the capacity of a foreign agent'. In particular, Sergey Poduzov was accused of having published three articles in his personal blog «7x7» without indicating that he works in a non-governmental organisation listed as a 'foreign agent'. However, Sergey Poduzov wrote those articles in his personal capacity and shared them with the readers of his personal blog. Despite this fact, the court found that one article published on 22 April 2016 violated the Administrative Code as it contained the logo of Man and the Law and did not mention the 'foreign agent' status of the organisation.

In 2015, following an earlier inspection of the organisation's finances, Man and the Law was forced to pay a fine of €4,000 after the Justice of the Peace of Section 10 of Yoshkar-Ola judicial district found the human rights organisation guilty of failing to register as a 'foreign agent'.

Front Line Defenders condemns the ongoing judicial harassment of Man and the Law, as it believes that it has been targeted solely as a result of its legitimate work in defence of human rights in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately cease all further harassment and targeting of the human rights organisation Man and the Law, and its members;
2. Remove the human rights organisation Man and the Law from the registry of 'Foreign Agents, and repeal the Federal Law №121-FZ, "On Introducing Changes to Certain Pieces of Legislation of the Russian Federation as Regards Regulation of Activities of Non-Commercial Organisations Performing the Functions of Foreign Agents" since the organisation does not engage in political activities;'
3. 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.