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Russia: Human rights defender Evdokiya Romanova found guilty of “gay propaganda”

On 18 October 2017, **Evdokiya Romanova** was found guilty of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors using the Internet” and fined 50,000 roubles. The accusations against her are related to articles and links that she shared on social media in 2015 and 2016.

[Evdokiya Romanova](#) is a human rights defender and member of the LGBT-rights movement “**Avers**”, which provides legal and psychological assistance to the LGBT community and defends the rights of other LGBT groups. She also works with “**Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights**” (YCSRR), the young feminists’ foundation “**Frida**” and the anti-racism group “**United**”. The YCSRR was established at the Hague Youth Forum in February 1999 with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The participants established the Coalition to support and help young people to realise their sexual and reproductive rights. At Avers, Evdokiya Romanova coordinated the work of volunteers and developed the international connections of the organisation. She was also involved in social theatre, based on the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology of popular community-based education, using theatre as a tool for social change.

On 18 October 2017, the Kirovsky District Court in Samara, in a closed hearing, found Evdokiya Romanova guilty of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships among minors using the Internet” under Article 6.21(2) of the Code of Administrative Offences, and sentenced her to an administrative fine of 50,000 roubles (approximately USD \$870). The charges were based on her sharing a link to the YCSRR’s website which called for youth activists to campaign for LGBTI rights. Charges also related to her reposting of media articles from V Kontakte, The Guardian and BuzzFeed articles on Facebook, including a story on Ireland’s same sex marriage referendum and an article about an LGBTI exhibition in St Petersburg.

On 26 July Evdokiya Romanova was called to her local police station to act as a witness for another case the police were investigating. However, on arrival she was questioned and charged under Article 6.21. She was denied legal representation when questioned and charged by the police.

The law prohibiting “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors” – also known as the “homosexual propaganda law” – was passed in Russia in June 2013. It introduced Article 6.21 into the Russian Code of Administrative Offences allowing for hefty fines for those who promote “non-traditional sexual relations”. Since the law was enacted, 15 Russians have been fined for spreading “gay propaganda”. In 2016 alone, Russian courts heard 12 cases concerning “gay propaganda,” issuing fines in eight of them. In June 2017, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the law was discriminatory.

Front Line Defenders believes that the law prohibiting “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors” violates freedom of expression and calls on Russian authorities to abolish it. Front Line Defenders further condemns the charges against Evdokiya Romanova as it believes that she is being targeted due to her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights in the Russian Federation.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately quash the conviction against Evdokiya Romanova as Front Line Defenders believes that she has been targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the “homosexual propaganda law” does not curtail the rights and freedoms of human rights defenders or jeopardise their legitimate human rights work;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of LGBTI human rights defenders;
4. Refrain from using the justice system to intimidate, harass and discredit human rights defenders;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions including judicial harassment.