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UA-Russia: Indigenous Peoples' Rights Association Aborigen-Forum listed as “Extremist”

On 25 July 2024, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation designated the informal association Aborigen-Forum as an “extremist” organization. This designation places anyone associated with Aborigen-Forum at high risk of administrative and criminal prosecution, including punishments of up to 10 years in prison and heavy fines, according to Articles 282.1, 282.2, 282.3, and 282.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Aborigen-Forum is an informal association of human rights defenders, independent experts, activists, leaders, public organizations and decolonial movements of the Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. The association is dedicated to protecting, promoting and advancing the rights of indigenous peoples through legislative monitoring and analysis of the laws affecting indigenous people. The association is also involved in awareness-raising campaigns in local and international level to bring attention to the systemic injustices faced by their communities.

On 25 July 2024, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation released an updated list of “extremist” organizations, which included Aborigen-Forum. This decision followed a ruling by the Supreme Court of Russia on 7 June 2024 which, at the motion of the Russian Ministry of Justice, recognized a so-called “Anti-Russian Separatist Movement” and its structural subdivisions as an extremist group. Aborigen-Forum and other organizations reported and argued against the verdict, noting that the “Anti-Russian Separatist Movement” has never existed and was fabricated by Russian authorities as a pretext to suppress legitimate and peaceful human rights work of indigenous organizations. Being listed as an “extremist” organization endangers Aborigen-Forum's human rights defenders and anyone associated with them, exposing them to potential administrative and criminal charges. This includes participating in any activities organized by the association, reposting content on social media, donating while remaining in Russia, or mentioning the organization without proper labelling as “extremist”.

Moreover, the updated list of “extremist” organizations also includes 54 other Indigenous Peoples' organizations, national minorities, and decolonial movements. The inclusion of 55 indigenous organisations clearly demonstrates a trend wherein Russian authorities use the "extremist" label to target, intimidate and silence human rights defenders and civil society organizations working on wide range of issues such as indigenous peoples rights, environmental rights and [LGBTI rights](#).

Members of Aborigen-Forum perceive this decision as a retaliatory response to their participation in international platforms, such as the United Nations. From 8 to 12 July 2024, Aborigen-Forum's representatives attended a session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, where they spoke about human rights violations against indigenous peoples in Russia and discussed Russia's undue influence on UN bodies.

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Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern over the listing of Aborigen-Forum as an “extremist” organization as it believes it to be a reprisal against the Association’s legitimate and non-violent human rights work. Front Line Defenders is concerned about the use of unfounded accusations against numerous indigenous independent human rights movements, including Aborigen-Forum, which appears to be the aimed at intimidating those working for and on behalf of minority rights and dismantling human rights work in Russia.

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

1. Immediately overturn the decision to declare Aborigen-Forum an extremist organisation;
2. Refrain from using security laws to target human rights defenders including indigenous human rights defenders and movements;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia can carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Russia’ international human rights obligations and commitments.