

URGENT ACTION

PROMINENT DEFENDER DECLARED CRIMINAL SUSPECT
Prominent human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko was informed on 24 June that she has been declared a suspect under the “foreign agents law”. She may face up to two years in prison.

On 24 June prominent human rights defender **Valentina Cherevatenko**, founder and chair of the Women of the Don Union, was informed during a search of the organization’s office in the city of Novocherkassk, in Rostov Oblast, south-western Russia, that she has now been declared a suspect under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code. Article 330.1 makes “systematic evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent” a crime which carries a penalty of up to two years in prison.

Article 330.1 was added to the Russian Criminal Code as part of the so-called “foreign agents law” which requires all NGOs who receive foreign funding and engage in vaguely defined “political activities” to register as “organisations performing the functions of foreign agents”, brand all their public materials accordingly and comply with a stringent reporting regime. The “foreign agents law” was enacted in 2012 as part of the Russian authorities’ crackdown on the right to freedom of association in the country. Since then, numerous independent NGOs have been facing intrusive inspections by the authorities and been having to deal with arduous court proceedings. Over a hundred NGOs have been included in the “foreign agents” register. However, this is the first time that an NGO leader has been accused of a criminal offence under Article 330.1 and it represents an ominous precedent for civil society in Russia.

The declaration of Valentina Cherevatenko as a suspect follows a series of preliminary interviews with investigators in May.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Urging the Russian authorities to immediately stop all criminal proceedings against Valentina Cherevatenko for violation of the “foreign agents law”;
- Calling on them to stop the harassment of Valentina Cherevatenko;
- Reminding them of their responsibility to ensure human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate activities free of harassment and without fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 AUGUST 2016 TO:

Prosecutor of Rostov Region
 Yuri Alekseevich Baranov
 Prosecutor’s Office of Rostov Region
 Per.Khalturinskiy, 101
 Rostov-on-Don 344011
 Russian Federation
 Fax: +7 863 210 5599 8 (if voice answers, ask for "Fax")
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation
 Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
 Prosecutor General’s Office
 ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
 125993 Moscow GSP- 3
 Russian Federation
 Fax: +7 495 987 5841/ +7 495 692 1725
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. EXCELLENCY MR ALEXANDER V. YAKOVENKO, Embassy of the Russian Federation (Residence of the Ambassador), 13 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QX tel: 020 7229 3620 or 020 7792 1408 email: info@rusemb.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 121/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/4075/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Women of the Don Union has worked tirelessly for over 20 years on a range of issues, from human rights to humanitarian relief and peacebuilding, in Rostov Oblast and the neighbouring regions, including in the North Caucasus. It is one of the most highly regarded and authoritative NGOs in Russia.

Women of the Don Union, and its sister organization Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development (where Valentina Cherevatenko is a member of the board), were declared "foreign agents" by the Ministry of Justice on 5 June 2014 and 27 October 2015 respectively.

Both Women of the Don Union and Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development have challenged their inclusion in the "foreign agents" register by the Ministry of Justice. On 29 February 2016 the Ministry of Justice officially removed one of them, Women of the Don Union, from the register stating that the organisation "had stopped performing the functions of a foreign agent".

Under Russian law a person investigated for a crime has the status of suspect until an indictment is issued against them at which stage they are formally accused.

The "foreign agents law" has had a chilling effect on many organisations and civil society activists in Russia. Its aggressive implementation by the authorities has resulted in a number of prominent NGOs choosing to close down, several more facing bankruptcy for refusing to brand themselves "foreign agents" and being issued with heavy fines, and has disrupted the normal work on hundreds of NGOs across Russia.

Further information on UA: 121/16 Index: EUR 46/4373/2016 Issue Date: 1 July 2016