

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

15 March 2019
AI Index: EUR 46/0059/2019

Russian Federation: a student is charged with “implicating minors” in a protest

In the afternoon of 7 February 2019, Ivan Luzin and two other students from Kaliningrad (Western Russia), came to the city’s central Victory Square to peacefully protest against torture. They carried placards with the names and ages of two men, who had allegedly been ill-treated by law enforcement officers as suspects pressed with questionable charges. The activists took photos of each other with the placards in their hands and then went to a nearby café. When the three finished their coffee and left the café, they were immediately arrested by police and brought to a police station. Authorities alleged that the young man and two young women had organized an illegal public event. The police also accused Luzin, who had recently turned 18, of “implicating minors in an unsanctioned protest” since the others were 16 and 15 years old. Presently Ivan Luzin is the first and the only person in Russia to be accused of this recently introduced “offence”. If found guilty, he is facing up to 15 days in jail or up to 50,000 rubles (about US\$760) fine.

The new law that introduced penalties for “implicating” people under the age of 18 in “unauthorised” protests was passed by the Russian parliament and signed into law by President Vladimir Putin in December 2018. It is widely seen as a response to the growing political and social activism of young people in Russia. High school and college students have been showing up in considerably larger numbers in peaceful protests against human rights violations, corruption, environmental and social issues, injustice and inequality in the past two years than in previous years.

The Russian government has an obligation, under international law and under the Russian Constitution, to ensure that young people can of their own free will meaningfully participate in public life and exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Children and young people are capable of forming and expressing their own views, and all over the world are playing a greater role in discussing matters that affect them and deciding on the future of their communities. States should put in place measures to facilitate the exercise of their human rights, not punish for it.

Prosecuting those who assist efforts by children and young people to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly is not only cruel, but places additional barriers for children to be able to freely express their opinions. If Russian authorities are genuinely worried about the safety of children and young people who take the streets to protest, as has been stated by the authors as the reason for introducing this law, they should focus on measures to facilitate the conduct of peaceful assemblies, including

advance planning for the presence of children at assemblies, training on how to deal with children engaged in protests and ensuring that the police does not use unnecessary or excessive force when dealing with rallies.

In recent years, Russian authorities have introduced numerous restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Human rights defenders now face draconian fines and lengthy “administrative detention” terms for simply protesting peacefully, while local administrations routinely ban rallies and deploy police to disperse and arrest protesters, often with the use of indiscriminate and disproportionate force, including beatings. Even those demonstrations expressly sanctioned by the authorities are often met with excessive force from the police: for example, police arrested some 30 participants of an authorized rally against online censorship Internet during a peaceful rally in Moscow on 10 March.

Amnesty International urges Russian authorities to drop charges against Ivan Luzin and to repeal the law on “implication of minors in unsanctioned protests”.