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### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

### Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova\*

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/23. Since the submission of the Special Rapporteur's first report,<sup>a</sup> the human rights situation in the Russian Federation has deteriorated further. There is now a structural, State-sponsored system of human rights violations legalized by new or revised legislation utilized to suppress civil society, dissenting views and political opposition. An environment of absolute impunity has been created, coupled with a lack of independent institutions to safeguard the rule of law and access to justice. Public anti-war expression or dissent of any kind is criminalized, the use of violence by law enforcement is condoned and arbitrary arrests and detentions are widespread. The persecution and incarceration rate of human rights defenders, journalists and political figures in the Russian Federation has increased sharply, with worsening conditions, including solitary confinement, enforced disappearance and death in custody.

<sup>a</sup> [A/HRC/54/54](#).

\* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information (up until 23 August 2024).



## I. Introduction

1. In the present report, the Special Rapporteur, Mariana Katzarova, has focused on recent developments contributing to the continued deterioration of human rights in the Russian Federation.
2. The Special Rapporteur notes with serious concern that the State's systematic human rights violations are part of a government strategy to control all spheres of life, both public and private, and to suppress dissent towards its aggressive foreign policy of waging war. A 2020 constitutional amendment, the arrests of opposition leaders and restrictions on civil and political rights severely compromised the Presidential election held in March 2024, enabling Vladimir Putin to remain as Head of State until at least 2030, and thus to continue that repressive domestic policy and foreign aggression abroad.
3. The harassment and intimidation of anti-war critics and perceived dissenters have escalated, with an increased use of criminal prosecutions, often resulting in lengthy prison sentences for the peaceful exercise of human rights.
4. The risk of severe punishment for any form of public dissent is very high, particularly for individuals and groups vulnerable to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion, Indigenous status or minority background.
5. There is an ongoing deterioration of legal protections and escalating pressures on human rights lawyers, including the criminal prosecution of defence lawyers.
6. The conditions and treatment of political prisoners have deteriorated, including through the increased use of detention in punitive solitary isolation cells (SHIZO) and cell-type confinement (PKT) for extended periods of time, transforming detention into torture. While it had been widespread and systematic in the past, in 2024, torture became overtly practised in the Russian Federation, exposing the Government's acquiescence and active policy of shielding perpetrators and preventing accountability.
7. The Special Rapporteur notes with serious concern the arbitrary deprivation of life in State custody of political opposition leader Alexei Navalny,<sup>1</sup> after he faced detention conditions and treatment amounting to torture, as well as the absence of an independent investigation into his death and a failure of accountability.
8. The Special Rapporteur also notes with concern the escalation of the war against Ukraine following the incursion on 6 August 2024 of the Ukrainian armed forces into the Kursk region of the Russian Federation. In response, on 10 August 2024, the Russian authorities began a "counter-terrorism operation" in three regions: Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk. The Russian legal framework governing such operations grants extensive powers to the security forces. This gives rise to significant human rights concerns, particularly given the current arbitrary application of counter-terrorism laws, the documented use of torture and other human rights violations during "counter-terrorism operations" in 2023–2024 and the history of serious violations committed during the Russian "Counter-Terrorism Operation" throughout the armed conflict in Chechnya of 1999–2009.

## II. Methodology

9. The Special Rapporteur regrets that, since the establishment of the mandate in 2022, official channels of communication with the Russian authorities have remained closed due to their unwillingness to recognize or cooperate with the mandate.
10. The Russian authorities are reminded of their obligation to adhere to international standards and to engage on a non-selective basis with this mandate and other international human rights mechanisms in the implementation of their findings and recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> See Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 36 (2018).

11. No replies have been received from the Russian authorities to communications relating to the mandate, whether from the Special Rapporteur individually or in collaboration with other special procedures.

12. Despite repeated requests, the Special Rapporteur has not been granted access to the country, which would have allowed a dialogue with the Government and other stakeholders and enabled the reflection of their position in this report. She reiterates her request for unhindered access to the country and all places of deprivation of liberty in the Russian Federation, including those where Ukrainian civilians are held, as mandated by the Human Rights Council.<sup>2</sup>

13. The Special Rapporteur has gathered information for this report from a range of sources inside and outside the Russian Federation, including non-governmental organizations, human rights and political activists, journalists and victims and their lawyers.

### III. Restrictive legislation: new developments

14. Recent amendments to the legal framework of the Russian Federation are part of a broader trend of using legal mechanisms to close down civic space and crack down on dissent against the war against Ukraine and to control the narrative regarding the activities of the Russian military and State security, thereby undermining fundamental human rights and freedoms.

#### A. Impact of “foreign agent” legislation on fundamental freedoms

15. The Russian authorities have employed extensively the label of “foreign agent”<sup>3</sup> to undermine fundamental rights, including the freedoms of expression and association, political and public participation and cultural life. Originally introduced into law in 2012, targeting non-governmental organizations, the “foreign agent” designation has been expanded to include media outlets, individuals and informal public associations. Almost anyone who engages in civic activism or expresses opinions about Russian policies can be labelled a “foreign agent”, severely restricting their activities and resulting in the massive shutdown of many civil society organizations and independent media organizations.

16. The Ministry of Justice has significantly accelerated the rate of designating “foreign agents”, to a total of 846 individuals and organizations as at 16 August 2024. In the 10 years from 2012 until March 2022, 336 “foreign agents” were designated; in the two and a half years since, 510 individuals and organizations were designated.<sup>4</sup>

17. Organizations and individuals designated as “foreign agents” are subjected to administrative and criminal penalties for non-implementation of the onerous bureaucratic requirements imposed by the legislation, such as registration, labelling, reporting and auditing, designed to be impossible to satisfy. Moreover, following two court-imposed fines, a third violation can trigger criminal prosecution.

18. In the second half of 2023, the Ministry of Justice created a new department to monitor, fine and prosecute offenders. As of June 2024, 25 criminal cases had been opened due to non-compliance with the legislation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Human Rights Council resolution 54/23.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Law No. 255-FZ of 14 July 2022 updates and integrates previous “foreign agent” laws, e.g. Federal Law No. 121-FZ of 20 July 2012 and increases penalties in the Administrative and Criminal Codes. See also [A/HRC/54/54](#).

<sup>4</sup> The register of “foreign agents” is available at [https://minjust.gov.ru/uploaded/files/reestrinostrannyih-agentov-16082024\\_7K7UpvE.pdf](https://minjust.gov.ru/uploaded/files/reestrinostrannyih-agentov-16082024_7K7UpvE.pdf) (in Russian).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://tass.ru/proisshestiya/21046399> (in Russian).

## **1. Freedom of expression**

19. The “foreign agent” designation is used systematically by the Government in an effort to control public opinion and stifle dissent, with aggressive enforcement against journalists and the media. The law’s burdensome requirements have resulted in the closure of most independent media organizations or their move overseas.

20. Media organizations designated as “foreign agents” must place a disclaimer on all their material stating that it was “produced by a foreign agent”. Wary of the label and its legal implications, people hesitate to quote or publish content from “foreign agents”.

21. Close to 200 media organizations and more than 100 journalists have been designated as “foreign agents”, with 87 new designations in 2023, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov.

## **2. Political and public participation**

22. The “foreign agent” designation is also used to curtail participation in political and public affairs, curbing civil and political rights. New restrictions introduced in May 2024<sup>6</sup> prohibit “foreign agents” from being elected as members of legislative or executive bodies at both the federal and local levels or participating in any electoral process. Elected officials can be removed if subsequently designated as “foreign agents”, thus allowing reprisals against officials whose actions are deemed unfavourable by the Government. “Foreign agents” are prohibited from working for the public authorities, having access to State funding or undertaking election monitoring, as, for example, the Golos Association. The detained Co-Chair of the Golos Association, Grigory Melkonyants, faces up to six years’ imprisonment for cooperating with an “undesirable” organization, the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations.

## **3. Freedom of association**

23. The law imposes extensive financial restrictions on “foreign agents”, limiting their access to both domestic and international resources. As a result, financial support for organizations designated as “foreign agents” declined in 2023. Starting in March 2024, Russian law prohibited “foreign agents” from advertising or being promoted in the media<sup>7</sup> and introduced fines and criminal prosecution for a repeated offence, with the aim of preventing the access of organizations designated as “foreign agents” to advertising revenues and further blocking their visibility.<sup>8</sup>

24. The vague and broad requirements imposed on “foreign agents” enable wide discretion in claiming violations and imposing excessive sanctions. Consequently, at least 147 legal entities designated as “foreign agents” have been dissolved.

## **4. Cultural expression**

25. Among other people, those working in the arts who oppose the war have been labelled as “foreign agents”, including award-winning playwright Ivan Viripaev, filmmaker Ilya Khrzhanovsky and the most accomplished living novelists of the Russian Federation, Ludmila Ulitskaya and Boris Akunin, whose books have been withdrawn from sale and distribution. They and many others have been forced into exile, facing additional risks, such as the threat of refoulement, as with the rock band Bi-2,<sup>9</sup> while those who remain face strict censorship and potential legal consequences.

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<sup>6</sup> Federal Law No. 99-FZ of 15 May 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Law No. 42-FZ of 11 March 2024.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://duma.gov.ru/news/58889/> (in Russian).

<sup>9</sup> See communication THA 1/2024. All communications mentioned in the present report are available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

## B. Designation as an “undesirable” organization

26. The separate designation of “undesirable” is used to target foreign and international non-governmental organizations. In August 2024, they numbered 186, with more than half added in the past 18 months,<sup>10</sup> including Freedom House, which ranked the Russian Federation as “unfree” in 2024.

27. It is illegal for organizations deemed “undesirable” to operate in the Russian Federation. Anyone who “participates” in, facilitates or organizes the activities of an “undesirable” organization faces up to six years’ imprisonment. In June 2024, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Russian Federation had violated freedom of assembly and expression by assigning the “undesirable” label.<sup>11</sup>

28. Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, only two media organizations were included in the “undesirable” list; since then, at least 14 have been added. Russian media organizations that have relocated abroad are being targeted as “undesirable” to suppress their reach within the Russian Federation. It is a crime to distribute content produced by “undesirable” media organizations and, as of April 2024, at least 19 people had been fined for doing so.

29. New amendments adopted in August 2024 allow the designation of “undesirable” to “foreign and international organizations whose founders or participants are government bodies of foreign States” and add harsher criminal sanctions.<sup>12</sup>

## C. Confiscation of assets and unregistered international and foreign organizations

30. Amendments to the Criminal Code in February 2024 expanded the grounds for property and asset confiscation to include charges relating to the “war censorship” laws,<sup>13</sup> allowing further financial punishment. In July 2024, journalist Alexander Nevzorov and his wife, Lidya, were declared an “extremist association” because of their criticism of the war and their assets were confiscated.

31. Amendments added in July and August 2023<sup>14</sup> ban international and foreign associations that are not formally registered in the Russian Federation<sup>15</sup> and penalize Russian citizens’ participation in them.<sup>16</sup> Vaguely defined “participation” in or organizing the activities of such an organization is punishable by a fine or imprisonment of up to three years.

32. At the same time, new amendments currently being considered will prohibit Russian civil society associations from carrying out activities without first forming a legal entity.<sup>17</sup> This will impose an even more controlling environment, inflicting additional bureaucratic constraints on civil society associations that may lack the resources to establish and maintain a legal entity.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7756/> (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> *Andrey Rylkov Foundation and Others v. Russia*, Applications No. 37949/18 and 84 others, Judgment, 18 June 2024.

<sup>12</sup> See communication RUS 6/2024.

<sup>13</sup> Federal Laws No. 31-FZ and No. 32-FZ of 4 March 2022, known as laws on “war censorship”.

<sup>14</sup> Three interconnected laws: Federal Law No. 409-FZ of 31 July 2023, Federal Law No. 412-FZ of 4 August 2023 and Federal Law No. 413-FZ of 4 August 2023.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/pages/reestr-nekommercheskih-organizacij> (in Russian).

<sup>16</sup> Article 330.3 of the Criminal Code.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/585970-8>. Access from outside the Russian Federation to this website and several others referenced in the present report require the use of a virtual private network (VPN).

## IV. Overview of the human rights situation

### A. Freedom of peaceful assembly

33. There were fewer mass protests in 2023 and 2024, indicating that the impunity of law enforcement officials for their violent crackdown on peaceful anti-war gatherings in 2022 has had a deterring effect. None of the police officers involved in the torture and ill-treatment, including sexualized violence, against the 2022 protestors have been held accountable.<sup>18</sup>

34. Protests by ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples in the regions of the Russian Federation are ruthlessly suppressed, particularly those in support of environmental rights. One such peaceful protest, in the Republic of Bashkortostan, started in December 2023, when hundreds gathered to protest the sentencing of activist Fayil Alsynov to four years in prison on groundless accusations relating to “extremism”. The protests were violently dispersed, leaving many participants injured, hundreds arrested and at least one dead in police custody, with 163 administrative and 80 criminal cases initiated against participants. Two protesters facing criminal investigation have since died, apparently as the result of torture and coercion by law enforcement.<sup>19</sup>

35. Hundreds of people across the Russian Federation paid tribute to Alexei Navalny after he died in prison in February 2024,<sup>20</sup> by laying flowers at public monuments dedicated to victims of reprisals. In response, the Russian authorities arrested nearly 600 people in 39 cities in an effort to prevent the tributes from becoming rallying points for protests. Over 163 individuals were put into administrative detention; some were tortured and ill-treated by police, with impunity. At least 119 more were arrested on the day of Mr. Navalny’s funeral, after the Russian authorities issued a public warning against any form of tribute to him. Yulia Navalnaya, Mr. Navalny’s widow, who publicly vowed to carry on her husband’s work, was arrested in absentia in July 2024 for participation in an “extremist” organization.

### B. Freedom of opinion and expression

36. The past year has been marked by increasing censorship, a crackdown on freedom of expression and political dissent and the targeting of human rights defenders, journalists, political opposition figures, artists, religious figures and other persons for asserting views that contradict State narratives, especially regarding the war against Ukraine. Those who dare to express dissent against Government policies face severe consequences, revealing a disturbing trend of the politicization of law enforcement and judicial processes in the Russian Federation.

37. According to the non-governmental organization OVD-Info, by 31 July 2024, at least 331 people had been prosecuted under the “war censorship” laws for spreading “knowingly false information” about the Russian armed forces and 192 for “discrediting the Russian armed forces or the Russian authorities”.

#### 1. Human rights defenders and anti-war critics

38. At least 1,372 human rights defenders, journalists and anti-war critics have been detained on politically motivated charges and sentenced in sham trials to lengthy imprisonment, often with treatment amounting to torture.

<sup>18</sup> Torture and ill-treatment are not criminalized as separate offences, as required by the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In October 2024, the Special Rapporteur will be submitting to the General Assembly a report on torture in the Russian Federation.

<sup>19</sup> See <https://reports.ovd.info/khronika-politpressinga-itogi-pervykh-semi-mesyacev-2024-goda#7-1> (in Russian).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/russia-un-experts-call-accountability-navalnys-death-and-immediate-release>.

39. On 1 August 2024, 16 of them were released in a prisoner exchange involving the Russian Federation and seven other countries. Among the political prisoners released from Russian detention were journalists Evan Gershkovich and Alsu Kurmasheva, political figures Vladimir Kara-Murza, Ilya Yashin and Andrey Pivovarov, Anti-Corruption Foundation members Lilia Chanysheva, Vadim Ostanin and Ksenia Fadeeva, artist Sasha Skochilenko, Kevin Lik, detained at the age of 17 years for “treason”, and leading Russian human rights defender and Co-Chair of Memorial, Oleg Orlov.

40. Widespread arbitrary detention, harsh sentencing and the deliberate use of torture and ill-treatment in detention, including frequent recourse to punitive solitary confinement for excessive periods, are commonly utilized against those who dare criticize the war. The continued imprisonment of political prisoners and denial of necessary treatment to those in a critical health condition, such as Alexei Gorinov, Igor Baryshnikov and Evgeny Bestuzhev, amount to torture and put them at risk of death in custody.

41. Age, stature and valued contributions to society offer no protection against State-driven persecution.<sup>21</sup> Yuri Dmitriev, a 67-year-old historian of the Gulag and former head of the Karelian branch of Memorial, imprisoned for exposing Stalinist-era crimes, repeatedly suffers prolonged punitive solitary confinement. Detained paediatrician Nadezhda Buyanova, 68 years old, faces 10 years’ imprisonment, accused by the widow of a serviceman of expressing opposition to the war against Ukraine during the medical check-up of her child.

42. At least 53 anti-war activists are currently being punished by forced psychiatric detention that can be indefinite,<sup>22</sup> including Victoria Petrova, 18-year-old Maxim Lypkan, and Alexander Gabyshev, a shaman from the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). Court statistics for the first six months of 2024 show 86 decisions imposing coercive psychiatric treatment on politically-motivated grounds. Journalist Maria Ponomarenko’s forced transfer to a psychiatric hospital, after detention in a SHIZO, amounts to torture.

## 2. Journalists

43. Journalists working within the Russian Federation face escalating risks, prompting many to flee abroad. Elena Trifonova, editor of *People of Baikal* in Siberia, one of the first publications to report on the funerals of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine and hidden graves, was forced into exile following a police raid on her office in September 2022.

44. Those continuing to report from inside the country risk criminal prosecution if their stories fail to meet the “war censorship” laws. At least 30 journalists are currently detained under a variety of fabricated criminal charges.<sup>23</sup>

45. Punishment is disproportionate, for example 22 years’ imprisonment for journalist Ivan Safronov, and is often inflicted as a warning to others:<sup>24</sup> journalist Roman Ivanov was sentenced in March 2024 to seven years’ imprisonment for posting on social media a United Nations report and a *New York Times* article about crimes concerning the killing of civilians in Bucha, Ukraine.<sup>25</sup>

46. Journalists with perceived connections to opposition political figures, including Mr. Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, have been detained under spurious “extremism and terrorism” charges, including Olga Komleva, Antonina Favorskaya, Artyom Kriger and Sergey Karelin.

47. International journalists, foreign nationals and those with dual citizenship have been arbitrarily detained on fabricated charges and used for leveraged prisoner swaps.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/russia-oleg-orlovs-trial-textbook-example-politicisation-law-enforcement-and>.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://meduza.io/feature/2024/07/29/bolnitsa-iz-kotoroy-ne-vyyti> (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> See <https://fom.coe.int/en/pays/detail/11709572>.

<sup>24</sup> CCPR/C/RUS/CO/8, paras. 26 and 27.

<sup>25</sup> See <https://cpj.org/2024/03/russian-journalist-roman-ivanov-sentenced-to-7-years-for-fake-news-about-army>.

### 3. Cultural figures

48. Individual artists and cultural figures who have used their creative efforts to call for ending the war against Ukraine and justice for the victims have been muzzled by increasingly harsh censorship and pressure. They have been pushed out of the public space through dismissal or forced resignation, labelled as “foreign agents”, or have had their books, songs or films withdrawn from sale and distribution or their artwork removed from exhibitions.

49. Artists have received heavy punishments, in particular for “extremism and terrorism”, for their perceived anti-war activities, including playwright Svetlana Petrychuk (imprisonment of six years), theatre director, Evgenia Berkovich (six years), poets Yegor Shtovba (five and a half years) and Artyom Kamardin (seven years). Mr. Kamardin said that he was severely tortured by three police officers; the authorities have refused to investigate.<sup>26</sup>

50. Pianist Pavel Kushnir, charged with “inciting terrorism” for posting anti-war videos, died in pretrial detention in July 2024. His death, reportedly due to a hunger strike to protest the war, raises serious concerns about the disregard by the Russian Federation of its obligation to protect prisoners’ lives.

51. Artists living in exile are tried and sentenced in absentia, including Pussy Riot member Lucy Stein, who was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment.

### 4. Religious figures

52. At least five Russian Orthodox priests have been criminally convicted for opposing the war on religious grounds, including 86-year-old Orthodox Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov. Some have resigned or left the country, including Moscow Patriarchate priest Aleksandr Dombrovsky. Orthodox priest Grigory Mikhnov-Voitenko was arrested after he announced plans to hold a memorial service for Mr. Navalny in the days following his death. Mikhail Simonov, a 63-year-old Orthodox Christian, received seven years’ imprisonment for posting on social media: “We, Russia, have become godless. Forgive us, Lord!”.

### 5. Political opponents

53. Prominent political opposition leaders have been imprisoned and suffered torture and ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement and inadequate medical care, or have been killed. The State authorities have failed to address credible allegations concerning their responsibility for Mr. Navalny’s death in custody.<sup>27</sup>

54. In a further punitive measure, some political figures already serving lengthy prison sentences, have had additional criminal charges brought against them, such as Mr. Gorinov, on the grounds of “justification of terrorism”. In 2024, Mr. Gorinov, Mr. Navalny and Mr. Kara-Murza were subjected to enforced disappearance of up to a month, an emerging trend in the treatment of political prisoners.

55. The instigators of Boris Nemtsov’s 2015 assassination have never faced justice.<sup>28</sup> In August 2024, one of the five people convicted to 14 years’ imprisonment for carrying out Mr. Nemtsov’s assassination was released after signing a contract to fight in the war against Ukraine.<sup>29</sup>

## C. Digital surveillance and online censorship

56. The Federal Service for the Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) has implemented a digital surveillance system known as

<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/russia-un-expert-calls-poets-jailed-free-speech-clampdown-be-freed>.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/02/comment-un-human-rights-office-spokesperson-liz-throssell-death-russian>.

<sup>28</sup> European Court of Human Rights, *Nemtsova v. Russia*, Application No. 43146/15, Judgment, 11 July 2023.

<sup>29</sup> See <https://meduza.io/news/2024/08/09/byvshiy-politseyskiy-temirlan-eskerhanov-osuzhdennyy-podelu-ob-ubiystve-borisa-nemtsova-osvobodilsya-iz-kolonii-i-uehal-na-voynu> (in Russian).



SORM across telecommunications networks in the Russian Federation to monitor and censor the Internet. This system enables surveillance, violates privacy rights and has been instrumental in the Government's efforts to suppress dissent and control information, particularly concerning the war against Ukraine.

57. Roskomnadzor maintains a centralized blacklist of IP addresses, domain names and URLs that Internet service providers in the Russian Federation are legally required to block. Over 1.7 million websites are currently blocked.<sup>30</sup> Roskomnadzor undertakes automated Internet scanning for illegal content, detecting unsanctioned protests, anti-war dissent and "LGBT<sup>31</sup> propaganda".

58. In March 2024, Roskomnadzor implemented new restrictions on the advertising of virtual private network (VPN) services, reducing people's ability to access uncensored information and communicate privately.

59. Roskomnadzor produces daily reports monitoring 3,500 social media accounts and creates bot farms to generate accounts that simulate human users to monitor and control discussions, especially those criticizing the Government.

60. In further censorship efforts, in June 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs banned 81 European media outlets, which prevents users inside the Russian Federation from accessing the websites and broadcasting materials of media organizations from 25 European countries.<sup>32</sup>

## D. Right to fair trial and rule of law

61. All of the issues raised in the 2023 report of the Special Rapporteur pertaining to the subversion of the rule of law and the lack of fair trial guarantees remain pertinent. Russian authorities have increased their attacks on the legal profession and lawyers, in particular those representing clients in cases of political persecution or national security.<sup>33</sup>

62. In April 2024, an amendment to the law governing the Russian bar (*advokatura*), undermined the autonomy of bar associations and the independence of the legal profession, in violation of fair trial standards.<sup>34</sup>

63. Lawyers have been prosecuted, disbarred and intimidated for providing legal services to persecuted groups and dissenters. At least three lawyers, including Alexei Ladin,<sup>35</sup> were disbarred in 2022 because they defended Crimean Tatars in courts in the Russian Federation.

64. Five of Mr. Navalny's lawyers face charges of "extremism". Three of them – Vadim Kobzev, Alexei Liptser and Igor Sergunin – have been in detention since October 2023 awaiting trial and two – Alexandr Fedulov and Olga Mikhailova – remain in exile and have been charged and arrested in absentia.<sup>36</sup> Vadim Prokhorov, defence lawyer of Mr. Kara-Murza, fled the country in April 2023 and was designated a "foreign agent" in March 2024.

## V. Human rights violations in the name of national security

65. Russian criminal law concerning crimes against the constitutional order and national security is increasingly being used to suppress freedom of expression and infringe on

<sup>30</sup> See <https://rsf.org/en/russia-s-blocks-rsf-site-ahead-world-press-freedom-index-release-mirror-site-still-accessible>.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout the present report, the acronym "LGBT" should be read as inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse persons, in line with reports of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (see, for example, [A/HRC/56/49](#)).

<sup>32</sup> See [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1959391](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1959391).

<sup>33</sup> [A/HRC/54/54](#), paras. 87–93.

<sup>34</sup> See communication RUS 1/2024.

<sup>35</sup> See communication RUS 2/2024.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-navalny-lawyers-warrants/32821279.html>.

fundamental human rights. A record number of criminal trials on those issues were held in 2023<sup>37</sup> and convictions increased to 862 in 2023, compared with 668 in 2022.

## A. Extremism

66. The definitions of “extremism” are imprecise, too vague and broad, allowing arbitrary interpretation and application<sup>38</sup> and thus enabling the targeting of anti-war activists, political opposition and other perceived critics with disproportionate sanctions. In April 2024 in Chita, two teenagers, Alexander Snezhkov and Lyubov Lizunova, received six and three and a half years’ imprisonment, respectively, on “terrorism and extremism” charges for their anti-war graffiti.

67. The Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) maintains a list of individuals and organizations classified as “terrorist and extremist” to block their assets and funds and control their financial activities. As of August 2024, 611 organizations and 15,339 people were on the list, including 52 children, the youngest 14 years old.<sup>39</sup>

68. In November 2023, following a closed-door hearing, the Supreme Court banned the “international LGBT social movement” as “extremist” and outlawed the rainbow flag as an “extremist” symbol.<sup>40</sup> A woman was sentenced to five days’ administrative detention for wearing frog-shaped earrings displaying a rainbow. At least three LGBT groups have closed for fear of prosecution.<sup>41</sup>

69. The “anti-Russian separatist movement” was banned as “extremist” by a 2024 decision of the Supreme Court, although no such organization or movement exists in the Russian Federation or abroad. This was followed by the inclusion on the “extremist” list of 55 organizations of Indigenous Peoples and national minorities.

70. “Extremism” charges are used to target religious minorities, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses. In 2023, at least 38 Jehovah’s Witnesses received prison sentences of up to seven years on “extremism” charges and another 68 were sentenced to various other penalties.<sup>42</sup>

## B. Terrorism

71. The number of convictions on terrorism-related charges has increased 50-fold in the past decade, with no acquittals.<sup>43</sup> The range of crimes considered to be terrorism has been expanded and penalties increased.

72. The use of torture and other human rights violations during “counter-terrorism operations” is widespread, especially immediately following initial apprehension,<sup>44</sup> with at least 22 reported cases in 2023. Following the arrest of Tajik men accused of the March 2024 terrorist attack on Moscow’s Crocus City Hall, two of the detained suspects were tortured on camera, including by cutting off an ear and inflicting electric shocks to the genitals.<sup>45</sup> Images of them and the other suspects, all bearing visible signs of torture and ill-treatment while in custody, were broadcast on Russian State television. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) claimed responsibility for the attack.

73. Terrorism charges continue to be used against people accused of being members of the Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir, with hundreds arrested in recent years<sup>46</sup> and given lengthy

<sup>37</sup> See <https://dept.one/story/rekord-gosizmena> (in Russian).

<sup>38</sup> See [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2012\)016-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2012)016-e).

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.fedsfm.ru/documents/terrorists-catalog-portal-act>.

<sup>40</sup> See communication RUS 28/2023.

<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/15/russia-first-convictions-under-lgbt-extremist-ruling>.

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/russia>.

<sup>43</sup> See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/7705/2024/en>.

<sup>44</sup> See <https://dept.one/story/kak-pytayut-v-rossii> (in Russian).

<sup>45</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-terrorist-attack-russian-concert-hall>.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://memopzk.org/list-persecuted/spisok-presleduemyh-chlenov-hizb-ut-tahrir> (in Russian).

prison sentences of up to 24 years.<sup>47</sup> Lawyer and human rights defender Bakhrom Khamroyev was sentenced in May 2023 to 14 years' imprisonment for online comments about the trials of migrants accused of being members of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

74. The mere discussion of certain issues relating to the war against Ukraine can lead to prosecution for "justification of terrorism". In February 2024, sociologist Boris Kagarlitskiy was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for discussing the implications of the attack on the Crimean bridge.<sup>48</sup>

### C. Treason

75. In April 2023, the maximum penalty for treason was raised to life imprisonment.<sup>49</sup> In 2023, at least four times more treason cases were opened than in 2022 and over twice as many people – at least 39 – were convicted of treason.<sup>50</sup> There is no public access to information as the trials were held behind closed doors.

76. The definition of treason, already vague and overly broad, was expanded in 2022, putting everyday people at risk. In August 2024, Kseniya Khavana was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for treason because she made a \$51 donation to a Ukrainian charity.

### D. Espionage and "confidential cooperation" with foreign entities

77. In 2023, nine people were convicted of espionage and an estimated 31 new cases were opened.<sup>51</sup> The definition of espionage was expanded in 2022 to include collecting, keeping and transferring to "enemies" information that could be used against the Russian armed forces or other State bodies during military operations, or the transfer of information to "hostile agents" – an unspecified concept thus open to interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

78. Criminal provisions were adopted in 2022 penalizing "confidential cooperation" with international or foreign organizations or foreign States that could harm national security. The broad, vague wording and hefty sanctions of up to eight years' imprisonment<sup>53</sup> could be used to prosecute anyone involved in international advocacy relating to the Russian Federation. According to official statistics, in 2023, at least two people were sentenced on such charges and one was placed in a psychiatric institution,<sup>54</sup> and at least 21 criminal cases were opened.

### E. Additional crimes

79. In 2022, new provisions were introduced in the Criminal Code, including penalizing public calls to conduct activities against State security, calls for sanctions against the Russian Federation, its nationals or legal entities and assistance in implementing decisions of international organizations to which the Russian Federation is not a party.<sup>55</sup> Several people<sup>56</sup> have been convicted under those provisions for opposing the war or mobilization, including

<sup>47</sup> See <https://memohrc.org/ru/special-projects/ufimskoe-delo-dvadcati-shesti-o-chlenstve-v-zapreshchyonnoy-hizb-ut-tahrir> (in Russian).

<sup>48</sup> See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/russia-anti-terrorism-legislation-misused-to-punish-activist-boris-kagarlitsky>.

<sup>49</sup> Federal Law No. 157-FZ of 28 April 2023.

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/12/21/russias-2023-treason-cases-hit-record-high-ngo-a83510>.

<sup>51</sup> See <https://www.sibreal.org/a/kak-v-2023-godu-fsb-ustanovila-rekord-po-dlam-o-gosizmene-i-shpionazhe/32753617.html> (in Russian).

<sup>52</sup> See <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/08/07/russias-legislative-minefield/tripwires-civil-society-2020>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> See <http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79&item=8690>.

<sup>55</sup> Articles 280.4, 284.2 and 284.3 of the Criminal Code.

<sup>56</sup> See <https://memopzk.org/news/my-schitaem-politizaklyuchyonnoj-tatyanu-moskalenko> (in Russian).

Kazan blogger Parvina Abuzarova, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for social media posts.<sup>57</sup>

80. Provisions concerning "assistance" could be interpreted to include any communications to, for example, the European Court of Human Rights, endangering applicants, lawyers and human rights defenders.

## VI. Human rights and the presidential election

81. Between 2018 and 2024, the Federal Law on the Election of the President of the Russian Federation was amended 11 times, with each amendment further curtailing the electoral rights of citizens and reducing opportunities for public oversight and independent scrutiny.

82. In 2020, a Constitutional amendment allowed third and fourth consecutive terms for the incumbent Head of State, thus enabling the 2024 re-election of President Vladimir Putin to his current fifth, and possible sixth, presidential term.

83. The Central Election Commission barred from the March 2024 presidential election the only two candidates campaigning on anti-war platforms: Boris Nadezhdin, who was barred because of alleged irregularities in the quality of the 100,000 signatures required in support of his candidacy, and Yekaterina Duntsova, who was disqualified for spelling mistakes in the enrolment documentation that she had submitted. It was not until after the election, in May 2024, that amendments to the law legalized the grounds for the disqualification. After the election, Ms. Duntsova was designated a "foreign agent", preventing her from, among other things, standing for any future election.

## VII. Conscientious objection and mobilization

84. Military service of 12 months is compulsory for all Russian men between the ages of 18 and 30 years.<sup>58</sup> Reservists may be called up in the event of mobilization, which currently means serving in the war against Ukraine.<sup>59</sup>

85. The Russian Constitution guarantees the right to alternative civilian service for every citizen.<sup>60</sup> The law provides no equivalent for mobilized men, however.<sup>61</sup> In November 2023, the Supreme Court affirmed the right to alternative civilian service during mobilization<sup>62</sup> but the authorities have yet to establish a procedure for this, and conscientious objectors continue to be forcibly sent to fight. Those who refuse have been tortured and criminally prosecuted. Regular contract troops are not allowed to request alternative civilian service.

86. In 2023 and 2024, mobilization focused on recruiting specific groups, including socioeconomically vulnerable people, prisoners, Indigenous Peoples, Russian citizens who had recently acquired citizenship, men with military-related specializations and, in some cases, migrants with temporary residence. Physical violence and underhanded tactics have been used to force men into signing contracts to join the war. Individuals who avoid mobilization can be prosecuted.

87. Military recruitment offices have been opened in migration processing offices; in the Kaluga region, officials demanded signed military contracts as a precondition for applying for naturalization, contrary to Russian law.<sup>63</sup> Migrants, in particular from Central Asia, have been targeted by police raids, forcing them into signing contracts to join the war.

<sup>57</sup> See <https://memopzk.org/news/my-schitaem-politzaklyuchyonnoj-parvinu-abuzarovu> (in Russian).

<sup>58</sup> Certain exemptions or deferrals are possible.

<sup>59</sup> See <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/05/21/how-russias-covert-mobilization-finds-manpower-for-the-war-in-ukraine-a85168>.

<sup>60</sup> Article 59 (3) of the Russian Constitution.

<sup>61</sup> Federal Law on Alternative Civilian Service, No. 113-FZ of 25 July 2002.

<sup>62</sup> See <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-right-alternative-military-service/32698045.html>.

<sup>63</sup> See <https://holod.media/2023/10/13/povestki-na-rynkah> (in Russian).

88. The head of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation claimed that, by June 2024, more than 30,000 foreigners who had received citizenship but had not registered for military service, had been “caught”. About 10,000 have already been sent to the war zone.<sup>64</sup>

89. A March 2024 federal law regulated the practice of prisoner recruitment. It exempts a suspect from an ongoing criminal prosecution or changes an inmate’s existing conviction to conditional if they sign a military contract. According to estimates by the non-governmental organization Russia Behind Bars, between June 2022 and June 2024, around 170,000 prisoners were sent to the war, including about 1,000 women.<sup>65</sup>

90. Regular contract troops are not allowed to resign. New, harsher punishments have been added to the law for desertion, going absent without leave and opposing a superior. A new crime of “voluntary surrender” has also been added. Reports suggest that torture and ill-treatment are used by Russian army commanders as punishment against servicemen who refuse to obey orders,<sup>66</sup> including locking soldiers in pits in the ground, called “zindan”, without food or water.

## VIII. Groups vulnerable to human rights violations

### A. Women and girls

91. Violence against women is prevalent due to a lack of legislative protection against domestic violence. Online polls suggest that the prevalence of partner violence against women may be as high as 38.2 per cent,<sup>67</sup> exceeding the 30 per cent global and European averages.

92. Many prisoners have fought in Ukraine in return for being pardoned, including some convicted of gender-based violence, such as femicide. On their return, some have committed new gender-based crimes: 19 cases were documented from September 2023 to March 2024. Among those cases were sexual assaults against children, with two instances resulting in death.

93. Participation in the war is considered a mitigating circumstance by judges, thus obstructing women seeking redress from violence. It can result in reduced penalties, such as shorter prison sentences or just a fine for the perpetrator.

### B. LGBT persons

94. Pronouncing the “international LGBT movement” as “extremist”<sup>68</sup> in 2023 has made it illegal to undertake any LGBT-related activity in the Russian Federation.

95. The first criminal cases were brought in March 2024: the owner, administrator and art director of a gay bar were charged with “organizing and participating in the activities of an extremist organization” and charges were initiated against the president of the LGBT organization Irida.

96. In an online survey conducted from December 2023 to February 2024, LGBT people from across the Russian Federation reported encountering high levels of physical and verbal abuse in a range of settings. Many LGBT persons have fled the Russian Federation.

97. Six cases are known of LGBT persons abducted by Chechen law enforcement and threatened with long prison sentences or death, unless they signed a contract to join the war

<sup>64</sup> See <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/968257> (in Russian).

<sup>65</sup> See <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/02/19/vazhnye-istorii-minoborony-rf-verbuet-zakliuchennykh-zhenshchin-na-voinu-v-ukraine-news> (in Russian).

<sup>66</sup> See <https://t.me/astrapress/25335> (in Russian).

<sup>67</sup> See <https://www.forbes.ru/forbes-woman/486866-ab-uz-slepki-kontrol-bolee-20-mln-rossian-stalkivalis-s-partnerskim-nasiliem> (in Russian).

<sup>68</sup> See communication RUS 28/2023.

against Ukraine. Such actions are part of a broader pattern of systematic persecution of LGBT persons in the North Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, where police and the military have subjected them to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture, including rape and sexual violence, perpetrated with impunity. If they were released, their families were often given free rein to murder them as “honour killings”, without facing any legal consequences.

98. In 2023, at least 243 people from the LGBT community in the North Caucasus contacted the human rights group North Caucasus SOS with requests for protection from persecution, twice as many as in 2022.

### C. Indigenous Peoples, minorities and migrants

99. Since the start of the war against Ukraine, the Russian State’s emphasis on national unity and patriotism has led to increasing attrition of a range of rights for minorities and Indigenous Peoples, from language and land rights to freedom of expression and security.

100. A lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation has resulted in violent hate crimes, murder, torture and ill-treatment, especially against migrant workers from Central Asia and non-Slavic minorities.<sup>69</sup> Violent hate crimes against them have increased since the March 2024 terrorist attack in Moscow. Indigenous and national minority rights organizations have been branded as “extremist”, “foreign agents” or “undesirable”,<sup>70</sup> forced to close<sup>71</sup> and their activists imprisoned.

101. Indigenous Peoples (by Russian legal definition, groups with fewer than 50,000 people), small-numbered Indigenous Peoples (under 10,000 people, who are exempt from conscription) and national minorities have been disproportionately mobilized, some by force, to fight against Ukraine. As a result, some small-numbered groups may face extinction from war casualties.

102. The Russian Government has not disclosed information on the ethnic composition of its army or casualties in the Ukraine war. Independent analysis shows wide ethnic disparities in fatalities, however, with minority groups approximately four times more likely to be killed in Ukraine than ethnic Russians<sup>72</sup> and 100 times more likely than people from Moscow. The data suggest that Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North are suffering the greatest war losses relative to the size of their populations.

103. Indigenous Peoples are one of the most impoverished demographic groups, with social and economic development and life expectancy far below the national average.<sup>73</sup> Yet in 2022, Russian authorities cut the subsidies mandated by law for Indigenous Peoples<sup>74</sup> and imposed onerous and arbitrary new requirements for registration to have access to these and other benefits.<sup>75</sup>

104. Amendments to laws limiting the stay of foreigners in the Russian Federation, which would expand the grounds for the extrajudicial restriction of their rights, are currently under consideration.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> See <https://minorityrights.org/country/russian-federation> and <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2023/12/mrg-protecting-rights-minorities-indigenous-peoples-russian-federation-english.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> See <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/09/01/russia-bans-minority-advocacy-group-free-buryatia-a82339>.

<sup>71</sup> See <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/civil-society-and-media/2019/11/russia-makes-ready-arctic-council-chairmanship-removing-critical>.

<sup>72</sup> See <https://www.demographic-research.org/articles/volume/48/31>.

<sup>73</sup> See [https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/Russia\\_UPR\\_2023\\_Final\\_2.pdf](https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/Russia_UPR_2023_Final_2.pdf) and <https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-the-russian-federation-english-langu/1680908982>.

<sup>74</sup> See <https://newizv.ru/news/2022-11-01/v-chume-bez-oleney-i-federalnyh-deneg-gosbyudzhzet-urezal-rashody-na-malye-narody-366967> (in Russian).

<sup>75</sup> See [https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/Russia\\_UPR\\_2023\\_Final\\_2.pdf](https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/Russia_UPR_2023_Final_2.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> See <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/953434> (in Russian).

105. A new law on citizenship entered into force in October 2023, which, among other things, drastically expanded the grounds for annulment of Russian nationality (for naturalized citizens) to include convictions for anti-war activities or on unspecified grounds of national security. The particular charge is to be determined at the discretion of the Russian Federal Security Service.

## **D. Detention of Ukrainians**

106. The ongoing war against Ukraine has led to a wide range of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Ukrainian civilians held in arbitrary detention by the Russian Federation are of particular concern because the Russian authorities do not provide information about their number, fate or whereabouts and many are subjected to enforced disappearance. The majority are kept incommunicado and, according to the testimony of those released in prisoner swaps, many are subjected to widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other sexual violence.<sup>77</sup>

107. In June 2024, President Putin said that 6,465 members of the Ukrainian military were in Russian captivity while Ukraine held 1,348 Russian soldiers.<sup>78</sup> The Russian Federation has failed to accord prisoner-of-war status to detained members of the Ukrainian armed forces, as required under the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. That failure deprives Ukrainian service members of the protections of the Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law. According to the Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 3,405 Ukrainian soldiers have been returned in prisoner swaps as at 17 July 2024.

108. As at 2 August 2024, at least 1,672 Ukrainian civilians were known to have been arbitrarily detained by the Russian authorities.<sup>79</sup> They are kept in at least 186 locations, including 89 in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, 6 in Belarus and 91 inside the Russian Federation, in penal colonies, pretrial detention centres and temporary makeshift tent camps. In addition, 14,000 Ukrainian civilians are missing.

109. Among those detained are opinion leaders, bloggers, journalists, activists, teachers, officials in local administrations, humanitarian aid volunteers, medical workers and pensioners. There is no established mechanism for the return of these civilians to Ukraine, although 157 have been returned through prisoner-of-war exchanges. The last known return of Ukrainian civilians was a prisoner-of-war transfer in June 2024, which included 10 civilians.

110. On first being arbitrarily detained in Ukraine by the Russian army or security services, civilians have been kept temporarily in harsh conditions in basements, school premises or army tents. Testimonies from survivors recount the systematic use of torture, including rape and other sexual violence, against both men and women, including elderly women as old as 82 and teenage girls. Torture has been used to extract testimonies about other civilians who opposed the Russian army or to obtain self-incriminating confessions as coercion to force cooperation or as punishment for being perceived as opposing the Russian army and supporting Ukraine or for having provided information to the Ukrainian armed forces.

111. From the initial places of detention, the civilians were forcibly transferred elsewhere in the Russian-occupied territories or deported to the Russian Federation, where they continued to suffer torture and ill-treatment. According to the accounts of formerly detained Ukrainian civilians who have returned from detention inside the Russian penitentiary system, they were kept separately from Russians and without charges. They testified to the use of electric shocks, mock executions, waterboarding, the shooting of hands and legs, starvation, a lack of access to adequate drinking water and other extreme torture resulting in deaths in

<sup>77</sup> As at 1 July 2024, the Ukrainian Office of the Prosecutor General had recorded 304 instances of conflict-related sexual violence committed by Russian forces against 112 men, 191 women, 14 girls and 1 boy.

<sup>78</sup> See <https://tass.ru/politika/21005829> (in Russian).

<sup>79</sup> As identified by families, civil society organizations, lawyers and returned civilians. The whereabouts of 900 of the detainees has been verified by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

custody. Both civilians and prisoners of war released from detention inside the Russian Federation also reported that they had experienced as well as witnessed sexual violence and rape while in detention, including with bottles or pipes, against both men and women.

112. They also testified to the refusal of the Russian authorities to allow access to adequate and timely medical care while they were in detention, despite many of them having severe injuries as a result of torture and ill-treatment experienced while in detention. They reported overcrowded cells with poor hygiene and sanitation and attempted suicides.

113. Some Ukrainians in detention are held on charges of “terrorism” or “espionage and extremism” and face 20 years’ to life imprisonment. Their cases are tried in military courts, primarily the Southern Military District Court in Rostov-on-Don, where 14 Ukrainian civilians are currently being held on “terrorism” charges. They have been tortured and ill-treated from the moment that they were detained in Russian-occupied Ukraine, according to their defence lawyers, and denied access to adequate and timely medical care, putting their lives at risk.

114. The Russian authorities initiated at least 93 criminal proceedings against captured Ukrainians in 2024.<sup>80</sup> In total, as at 2 August 2024, criminal cases had been opened against at least 655 Ukrainians, including 475 combatants and 180 civilians – 35 women and 620 men – with 31 of them released through prisoner-of-war swaps.

115. In June 2024, 22 members of the Ukrainian Azov battalion were put on trial, accused of terrorist activities against the Russian Federation and attempting to overthrow the constitutional order. They are being tried as civilians because the Russian Federation does not recognize their prisoner-of-war status. They have been in detention since March or April 2022. Two cooks of the Ukrainian Aidar battalion, Viktoriya Tkachenko and Nataliya Prydatchenko, were sentenced in December 2023 to five years’ imprisonment in the Russian Federation.

116. Over 2,000 Ukrainian civilian prison inmates from five penal colonies in the Russian-occupied territories have been deported to prisons across the Russian Federation, where they are held incommunicado, separately from other inmates, and subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

117. There is no mechanism for the return of these inmates upon the completion of their sentences. Some 250 cases have been documented of inmates released in the Russian Federation and then detained again, in immigration detention centres, for alleged violations of the migration law. Some were subsequently taken by Russian police to the border between Georgia and the Russian Federation and released. Civil society organizations have recorded 120 cases of former inmates who have returned to Ukraine.

118. The Government of Ukraine has recorded the forcible transfer of 19,546 children to Russian-occupied Crimea or their deportation to the Russian Federation or Belarus as of the end of July 2024; 388 have been returned.<sup>81</sup> The Russian authorities have failed to reveal the whereabouts, fate and well-being of all the forcibly transferred or deported Ukrainian children.<sup>82</sup> Some have been put through Russian adoption procedures. According to interviews with returned children, some were subjected to sexual violence during their time in Russian institutions and some experienced or witnessed physical violence and threats against children by the staff.

## IX. Human rights in the North Caucasus

### A. Chechnya

119. Chechnya has a history of human rights violations and abuses, including high-profile political assassinations, the murders of journalists, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial

<sup>80</sup> See [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/e/573346\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/e/573346_1.pdf), para. 41.

<sup>81</sup> See <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>82</sup> See [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751_1.pdf).



killings and widespread torture and ill-treatment committed by Chechen police and security forces, with the tacit or explicit endorsement of the federal Government.

120. That climate of widespread violence and impunity continues today. The Russian non-governmental organization Crew against Torture estimates that, in 2021 and 2022, only 13 per cent of torture allegations resulted in an immediate criminal investigation and, for 65 per cent, no investigation was initiated at all. Of those that led to a criminal case, the investigators had, on average, issued two refusals to bring charges, before finally deciding to open a case.

121. Chechnya operates as a State within a State, under the tight control of President Ramzan Kadyrov. Nepotism is rampant, with President Kadyrov's relatives, including some of his 14 children, holding significant power.

122. President Kadyrov's 15-year-old son, Adam, became notorious in September 2023 when his father published<sup>83</sup> a video of him severely beating a handcuffed detainee, Nikita Zhuravel, accompanying his son's actions with supportive comments. Zhuravel filed a complaint, but the Grozny police refused to open a case against Adam because he was a minor.<sup>84</sup> Subsequently, Adam was reportedly awarded the Hero of Chechnya medal, the highest honour of the republic. In November 2023, he was appointed head of the security department of the President of the Republic.<sup>85</sup>

123. The Chechen authorities have imposed controls on everyday life, including religion, culture and private life, enforcing a conservative form of Islam. In illegal, secret prisons, people targeted by law enforcement are subjected to torture, extortion, humiliation and extrajudicial executions. The investigation of these crimes is impossible due to the systematic instrumentalization of the investigative agencies and courts for political purposes, including the federal structures charged with oversight.

124. Data on abductions is scarce due to a lack of reporting for fear of reprisals. In May 2024, around 90 people were abducted in response to the arson of a car with license plates and insignia linked to President Kadyrov. According to Memorial, among the abducted were about 50 members of the family of Sayf-Islam Elmurzaev, the arson suspect. This sort of collective punishment is increasingly being employed in Chechnya, with relatives of critics or perceived offenders facing abduction, detention and torture or forced mobilization to the war zone.<sup>86</sup>

## **B. Ingushetia**

125. In June 2024, the highest court in Pyatigorsk upheld the lengthy prison sentences of seven defendants involved in peaceful protests in the Ingushetia in 2019 against a border agreement with Chechnya. Memorial has recognized them as political prisoners. The case illustrates how local authorities and the federal judicial systems act together to curb opposition and maintain strict control.

## **C. Dagestan**

126. Dagestan is majority Muslim but with some religious diversity and inter-ethnic tension. Terrorist attacks in Derbent and Makhachkala in June 2024 targeted two synagogues, two Eastern Orthodox churches and a police post, killing 22 people and injuring 46.

<sup>83</sup> Telegram account of Ramzan Kadyrov, 25 September 2023, available at [https://t.me/RKadyrov\\_95/3924](https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/3924) (in Russian).

<sup>84</sup> See <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/393122> (in Russian).

<sup>85</sup> See <https://meduza.io/news/2023/11/05/15-letnego-syny-ramzana-kadyrova-naznachili-na-otvetstvennuyu-dolzhnost-v-sluzhbu-bezopasnosti-glavy-chechni> (in Russian).

<sup>86</sup> See <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/urok-vsem-nesoglasnym-rodstvennikov-kritikov-kadyrova-nasiljno-otpravlyayut-na-voynu-v-ukrainu-/32541042.html> (in Russian).

127. In October 2023, after the Gaza bombing began, a large violent crowd stormed the Makhachkala airport, shouting antisemitic slogans and threatening Jewish passengers on a flight arriving from Tel Aviv. In 2024, five people were criminally charged for participating.

## D. Women and girls

128. In the North Caucasus, women are systematically denied their rights and subjected to “honour killings” – murdered with impunity by relatives to “restore family honour” over suspected “inappropriate behaviour”. In 2017, of 39 recorded cases, only 14 went to trial. More recent statistics are absent owing to the lack of reporting, investigation and prosecution of such crimes.<sup>87</sup>

129. The Marem Crisis Centre has seen a rise in women seeking help, especially because of domestic violence or forced marriage. Those fleeing are coerced by relatives to return, often with the active complicity of law enforcement.<sup>88</sup>

130. Female genital mutilation is not outlawed and continues to be performed on young girls, primarily in Dagestan, at home or in private clinics, with an estimated 1,240 victims annually.<sup>89</sup> In January 2022, the first criminal female genital mutilation case in the Russian Federation was heard involving a 9-year-old girl in Ingushetia. The doctor who performed the procedure was charged with “causing minor harm to health”, leading to minimal punishment.<sup>90</sup>

## X. Reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations

131. Reprisals are used as another egregious way to attack civil society. Many Russian civil society members have sought anonymity when engaging with the Special Rapporteur, fearing intimidation and reprisals from their Government.

132. Man and Law, a human rights organization in the Russian republic of Mari El, received Economic and Social Council consultative status with the United Nations in December 2022, despite opposition from the Russian Federation.<sup>91</sup> In reprisal, Man and Law was forcibly dissolved in August 2023 by a court decision for violating the “foreign agent” legislation.

133. In May 2024, the Government requested that the Centre for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North be deprived of its Economic and Social Council consultative status on the grounds that it lacked legal recognition in the Russian Federation. The Russian authorities closed the organization in 2019, after having designated it as a “foreign agent” in 2015.

134. The 2024 designation of the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia as “extremist” was a possible reprisal for their cooperation with the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other human rights mechanisms.<sup>92</sup>

135. Human rights activist Alexei Sokolov, head of an organization exposing torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, was arrested in July 2024 for displaying the Facebook logo online, considered an “extremist symbol” in the Russian Federation. Law enforcement seized

<sup>87</sup> See <https://www.srji.org/about/annual/Pravovaya-initsiativa-Otchet-UBITYE-SPLETNYAMI-2020> (in Russian).

<sup>88</sup> See <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/semjyam-pomogayut-siloviki-pochemu-beglyanok-s-severnogo-kavkaza-vozvrashchayut-k-abjuzeram/32813274.html> (in Russian).

<sup>89</sup> See [https://web.archive.org/web/20220124092434/https://www.srji.org/about/annual/strategii-protivodeystviya-FGM-proizvodstvo\\_kalechashchikh\\_operatsiy\\_sji](https://web.archive.org/web/20220124092434/https://www.srji.org/about/annual/strategii-protivodeystviya-FGM-proizvodstvo_kalechashchikh_operatsiy_sji) (in Russian).

<sup>90</sup> See <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2022/02/1417812> (in Russian).

<sup>91</sup> See communication RUS 3/2024.

<sup>92</sup> See <https://icpr.international/archives/1037>.

confidential documents concerning Mr. Sokolov's work with United Nations treaty bodies, raising concerns of reprisal, including for his international human rights work.<sup>93</sup>

## XI. Conclusions and recommendations

136. As reported previously by the Special Rapporteur, the human rights situation in the Russian Federation has been declining steadily over the past two decades. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, now a grinding war in its third year, has not only killed thousands and devastated the lives of millions in Ukraine, but has also intensified oppression within the Russian Federation itself, highlighting the stark link between aggression abroad and repression at home.

137. There is no longer any safe space for civic action or political opposition. The death in prison of Alexei Navalny and the mistreatment amounting to torture of other political prisoners illustrate the brutal persecution of government critics and anti-war activists.

138. The package of laws banning so-called "fake news" about the war and "discrediting the army", adopted just a week after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, plus those creating "foreign agents", "undesirable organizations" and "extremists", have led to thousands of Russians being charged with administrative and criminal offenses and being arbitrarily detained. Prison sentences are increasingly lengthy and disproportionate.

139. These and additional laws have had devastating effects, obliterating not only the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in the Russian Federation, but also the civic rights to participate in public life and stand for elections.

140. Vague legal definitions, their wide, unpredictable and often abusive interpretations and the use of closed trials has allowed the Russian authorities to misuse and instrumentalize counter-extremism, counter-terrorism and national security legislation to suppress critics, outlaw anti-war expression and incarcerate legitimate political opponents.

141. The release of some prisoners on 1 August 2024, while welcomed, highlighted the use by the Russian authorities of arbitrary detention on fabricated charges against foreigners or dual nationals for the purpose of leveraged prisoner swaps. For those released in the swap, concerns remain as to whether their freedom has been fully restored, including by expunging their criminal records.

142. The right to privacy is severely jeopardized by the Government's control of online information and its use of digital surveillance tools to suppress dissent through the monitoring and censorship of the Internet and through prosecution.

143. Entrenched impunity and a lack of accountability, purposefully orchestrated by the Russian authorities, have further crushed any dissent or differing opinion or expression. Law enforcement officials have been given, de facto, a free hand to deal with "undesirables", leading to the institutionalization of torture and arbitrary detention.

144. The impact of these measures is especially detrimental to already vulnerable groups, such as women, LGBT persons, national and ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples and migrants, who have been targeted and victimized.

145. The North Caucasus region has further spiralled into lawlessness. Denial of the rights of women, gender-based violence, including domestic violence and female genital mutilation, torture and ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, abductions and "honour killings", the collective punishment of relatives and the brutal suppression of the rights of LGBT persons, have become widespread.

<sup>93</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/russia-must-free-human-rights-defender-alexey-sokolov-arrested-posting>.

146. The persistent, widespread and systematic suppression of human rights throughout the Russian Federation, which has accelerated over the past two and a half years, underscores the urgent need to engage with the Russian authorities concerning their obligation to uphold and protect the fundamental human rights of all people and guarantee a free and open public sphere.

147. There is an urgent and continuing need for the monitoring, analysis and redress of human rights concerns in the Russian Federation by all United Nations mechanisms.

148. The Special Rapporteur is grateful to all those who provided information for this report, often in the face of grave danger and heightened risk of intimidation and reprisals. She calls on States and the international community to take urgent steps to secure their protection.

149. The Russian Government has made no attempt to implement the recommendations from the Special Rapporteur's first report, of September 2023,<sup>94</sup> which remain valid. Further guidance concerning legal reforms and measures required to address the challenges that undermine the exercise of human rights in the Russian Federation is given below.

150. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Russian authorities:

(a) Recognize and constructively cooperate with the mandate, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions, and engage with human rights mechanisms non-selectively to address the systematic and widespread human rights violations identified. They should provide unhindered access for the Special Rapporteur to the country and to meaningful engagement with all relevant stakeholders, as well as access to all places of deprivation of liberty in the Russian Federation;

(b) Undertake fundamental reforms, including constitutional, legislative and administrative, to establish an effective system of accountability, in line with international law, to ensure the separation of powers, political pluralism and democratic participation in governance and decision-making;

(c) Ensure legal safeguards and their effective implementation against arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, ill-treatment and sexual and gender-based violence;

(d) Acknowledge the whereabouts of and release immediately and unconditionally all civilians arbitrarily detained in or deported from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation and subjected to enforced disappearance and/or held incommunicado and ensure their safe return, especially of children, and bring to justice all Russian authorities responsible for the torture and ill-treatment of Ukrainian detainees. Ensure the safe return of Ukrainian civilian prison inmates deported to the Russian Federation, upon the completion of their sentences;

(e) Ensure the prompt and impartial investigation of all allegations of torture and death in custody consistent with international standards, immediately end the use of torture and other ill-treatment, especially ensuring that confessions obtained through torture or ill-treatment are never admitted as evidence in any legal proceedings, and prosecute those responsible for torture or other ill-treatment, including public officials and law enforcement officers, and if they are convicted, sanction them in a manner commensurate with the gravity of the crime;

(f) Release all political opposition activists detained for peacefully exercising their rights, in particular Alexei Gorinov, Daniel Kholodny and Igor Baryshnikov, and expunge their criminal records, conduct an independent, impartial and transparent investigation consistent with international standards into the death of Alexei Navalny and into allegations concerning his conditions of detention and denial of access to medical treatment, ensuring that any unlawful acts are prosecuted and perpetrators brought to justice;

<sup>94</sup> [A/HCR/54/54](#).

(g) Cease judicial harassment and the instrumentalization of the court system for political purposes to silence civil society and dissenters. Immediately release all detained human rights defenders, journalists, media workers, lawyers, cultural figures, and anti-war activists, including those in forced psychiatric detention, and expunge their criminal records, including, but not limited to, Evgenia Berkovich, Svetlana Petrychuk, Artyom Kamardin, Yegor Shtovba, Yury Dmitriev, Alexei Liptser, Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin, Grigory Melkonyants, Mikhail Afanasiev, Ivan Safronov, Maria Ponomarenko and at least 27 other journalists. Foster a safe environment enabling human rights advocates to function without fear of reprisals;

(h) Undertake reforms to ensure the independence of the judiciary, including the effective implementation of the right to a fair trial in both criminal and administrative proceedings, especially through access to a lawyer of one's own choosing from the moment of detention and throughout the proceedings;

(i) Repeal urgently the 2024 Amendments to Federal Law No. 63-FZ on Advocacy and the Legal Profession of 31 May 2002 and effectively ensure that lawyers are not threatened with or subjected to intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, deprivation of liberty or life or other sanctions for doing their work;

(j) Repeal urgently restrictive legislation on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" and cease the practice of designating as "foreign agents" those exercising their freedoms of opinion and expression, especially independent media organizations, political associations, LGBT advocates, feminist, environmental and Indigenous activists and other civil society activists and organizations and ensure that women human rights defenders are especially protected and that journalists and media organizations can operate without fear of reprisals;

(k) Repeal legislation, administrative policies and practices employed by State authorities to monitor and censor the Internet, including the arbitrary blocking of websites, the curtailment of access to VPN services and social media platforms and the restriction of access to telecommunications networks, which restrict freedom of expression and opinion and interfere with the right of access to information;

(l) Review urgently and amend the counter-terrorism and extremism legal framework, aligning it with international standards, eliminating vague definitions and removing the risks of arbitrary implementation, especially against individuals expressing criticism of and dissent about the war against Ukraine, and cease holding trials behind closed doors;

(m) Revoke amendments to the law on non-profit organizations, secure the right to form and participate in associations and amend the law on public assembly to remove all restrictive provisions that make it impossible to protest in any meaningful way;

(n) Conduct independent, impartial and transparent investigations consistent with international standards concerning the excessive use of force by authorities during protests and ensure accountability for law enforcement for human rights violations committed during protests and against those arbitrarily detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly;

(o) Repeal Administrative Code articles 19.34 (violations relating to foreign agent activities), 20.3.3 (public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Russian armed forces), 20.3.4 (calls for sanctions against the Russian Federation) and Criminal Code articles 207.3 (knowingly false information containing data about the use of the Russian armed forces), 280.3 (discrediting the use of the Russian armed forces or of the exercise of powers by the Russian public authorities), 330.1 (violation of regulations on foreign agents), 284.1 (criminalization of activities associated with undesirable organizations) and 284.2 (calls for sanctions) and revise articles 275.1 (high treason), 282.1 (organization and participation in an extremist community) and 205.2 (public calls for terrorist activities or the public justification and propaganda of terrorism) to align with international human rights standards, ensuring that legitimate activities and/or peaceful dissent are not criminalized;

(p) Ensure full respect for the constitutional right to conscientious objection to military service, including in the context of mobilization – equally for those called up and for those already serving – and provide for a strictly civilian alternative to military service. Without delay, end the harassment and criminal prosecution of conscientious objectors and the practice of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of those refusing mobilization or refusing to fight;

(q) End all forms of violence against women and girls, including through the adoption and effective implementation of laws and policies to criminalize domestic violence. In particular, in the North Caucasus, end forced marriage, female genital mutilation and “honour killings” of women and girls;

(r) Rescind the 2023 decision of the Supreme Court designating the “international LGBT movement” as “extremist” and set aside all administrative and criminal convictions pronounced as a result. End the persecution and arrest of LGBT persons on charges of “extremism” or “promoting the symbols of an extremist organization” and conduct thorough independent investigations into all violations of LGBT persons’ rights, ensuring accountability for the perpetrators and justice for the victims;

(s) Fully protect the rights of all persons belonging to ethnic minorities, ensure respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation, especially their rights to land, natural resources and cultural practices, and eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against them;

(t) Prevent and combat hate speech and hate crimes, including against migrants, by ensuring that those committing or espousing them are held accountable. Ensure regular awareness training, education and sensitization of government officials and the judiciary;

(u) Ensure the independent and impartial investigation and prosecution of all cases involving terrorism, especially the recent attacks in Moscow and Dagestan, strictly adhering to the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment and the inadmissibility of evidence thus extracted, and ensure that victims of all atrocities receive full and effective remedies;

(v) Prevent hate-motivated violence and address the root causes of terrorism by effectively combating the increasing antisemitism, religious intolerance and xenophobia and the systemic corruption and pervasive impunity in the Russian Federation, particularly in the North Caucasus;

(w) Ensure respect for fundamental human rights and strict adherence to international human rights standards in the North Caucasus, including by ending arbitrary detention, abductions, enforced disappearance, extrajudicial executions of government critics, torture and ill-treatment, including rape and sexual violence against LGBT persons and “honour killings” of LGBT persons and of women and girls, investigate impartially and promptly all allegations of such violations and bring perpetrators – be they private persons or public officials – to justice;

(x) End all forms of intimidation and reprisal against individuals and civil society organizations that seek to cooperate with the United Nations, including its human rights mechanisms and the mandate, and put safeguards in place to prevent future reprisal.

151. The Special Rapporteur also recommends that the international community and the States Members of the United Nations:

(a) Continue to monitor and prioritize human rights issues and the implementation of international human rights obligations in all their engagements with the Russian Government;

(b) Fully utilize diplomatic channels to engage in advocacy with the Russian authorities to immediately release all political prisoners and promote human rights-based solutions to the issues identified;

(c) Strengthen support to Russian independent media organizations, human rights defenders, lawyers, cultural figures and civil society organizations, both domestically and internationally, to bolster their resilience and adaptability in the face of risks and enable them to collectively identify solutions to human rights challenges;

(d) Adopt concrete measures to protect dissenters and human rights defenders, both those continuing to work inside the Russian Federation and those in exile and their families, in consultation with and on the basis of the needs identified by civil society itself, facilitate freedom of movement for human rights defenders continuing to work inside the country by providing unhindered access for them to travel outside the Russian Federation and to return, enable and support exiled Russian human rights defenders to continue their human rights work abroad by facilitating the registration and functioning of their non-governmental organizations, allowing them to secure funding, ensuring their ability to open bank accounts and providing freedom of movement for them and their family members, including by facilitating visits by family members still living in the Russian Federation. For those seeking asylum, provide urgent access to the asylum procedure, without prejudice as to the outcome, and avoid the lengthy delays of up to three years awaiting asylum interviews while holding persecuted Russian human rights defenders in immigration detention;

(e) Consider granting protection and asylum to conscientious objectors of military service who have fled the Russian Federation and exercise due diligence to prevent their expulsion or extradition back to the Russian Federation in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, since there is a well-founded fear of persecution and substantial grounds to believe that, upon their return, they would be prosecuted and face imprisonment and/or torture and ill-treatment in custody.

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