

5 September 2025

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council

Excellency,

We, the undersigned organisations, urge your delegation to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation during the 60th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). Since the Council last renewed the mandate, the human rights situation in Russia has deteriorated even further, underscoring the indispensable role of this mandate.

Over the past 12 months, Russia has consolidated its repression, systematically eliminating space for independent civil society, free expression, and dissent, as highlighted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in his global updates to the HRC in March and June 2025. In his March 2025 update the High Commissioner said: "Stringent laws have been adopted to stifle free expression, labelling critical voices as foreign agents or undesirable organizations. Many journalists and activists, including anti-war protestors, have faced harassment, arrest, or exile, resulting in the near elimination of any form of dissent within the country." This repression has become increasingly codified through new legislation, making it not only pervasive but permanent too.

Key developments since summer 2024 include:

- Prosecutions for so-called "state security" crimes have surged, with 145 treason convictions recorded in 2024 alone, nearly one every two days. Sentences of more than ten years have become common, including in cases involving small donations to humanitarian causes in Ukraine;
- Civil society and human rights defenders face constant targeting through the expanded use of "foreign agent" and "undesirable organisation" laws. April 2025 amendments extended the "foreign agent" label to anyone cooperating with international institutions such as the International Criminal Court. The law on "undesirable organisations" has been used to shut down the independent election-monitoring organisation Golos after its co-chair was sentenced to five years in prison, just weeks ahead of national elections. In May 2025, Amnesty International was also declared an "undesirable organisation", further illustrating the breadth of this repression. Lawyers are also systematically prosecuted and convicted merely for performing their professional duties, including human rights lawyer Maria Bontsler, facing up to 8 years in prison on bogus charges of secret collaboration with a foreign state. In January 2025, Alexei Navalny's defence lawyers, Igor Sergunin, Alexei Liptser and Vadim Kobzev, were sentenced to several years in prison, accused of belonging to an extremist group, following a closed-door trial which failed to meet international human rights standards of fair trial;
- Independent journalism is under unprecedented pressure. Four journalists were sentenced in April 2025 to more than five years in prison for alleged links to Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, which authorities have labelled an "extremist organisation". An advertising ban coming into force in September 2025 will further jeopardise the economic survival of independent media outlets by prohibiting ads on platforms labelled as extremist or undesirable;
- Repression facilitated by digital technology has been further institutionalised through the electronic Register of Summons, launched nationwide in May 2025, which automatically enforces conscription measures and travel bans. A government order introduced in April 2025 requires telecom providers to transfer user and geolocation data within one hour, embedding real-time surveillance into law. Legislation enacted in July 2025 prohibiting searches of "extremist" materials online has added to the climate of fear and self-censorship, and is likely to generate a new wave of arbitrary prosecutions. At the same time, authorities have blocked independent encrypted messengers such as Signal and restricted voice and video calls on other platforms, further undermining the right to privacy;
- The Supreme Court's 2023 ban on "international LGBT movement" has resulted in criminal cases against publishers and booksellers and the retroactive prosecution of individuals for years-old social

media posts. In December 2024, a new law prohibiting “child-free propaganda” came into force, criminalising neutral or positive references to choosing not to have children. In addition, in November 2024, 172 organisations, including those of Indigenous Peoples, were declared “terrorist”, further targeting marginalised communities;

- Memorial, one of Russia’s most historic and respected human rights organisations, reported that as of August 2025 the country holds at least 1,091 individuals that the organisation has classified as political prisoners. This includes hundreds prosecuted for peaceful anti-war expression, religious affiliation, or symbolic acts. Many face further violations in detention, including denial of medical care, fabricated disciplinary punishments and further criminal prosecutions, and prolonged solitary confinement. In August 2025, Memorial’s co-chair and head of its Political Prisoners project, Sergei Davidis, was sentenced in absentia to six years’ imprisonment, illustrating the authorities’ determination to silence even the country’s most respected human rights defenders.

These developments illustrate a profound transition: Russia is no longer only repressing dissent, including retroactively, but structurally removing the possibility of lawful human rights-related civic activity. Lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and ordinary citizens, including women, children, and elderly people are all subject to prosecution, imprisonment, and potentially inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Special Rapporteur remains the only independent UN mandate dedicated to documenting these violations and providing an authoritative account of conditions inside Russia. The work of the mandate is a vital resource for states, international institutions, and above all, for Russian civil society struggling to survive under unprecedented repression. The mandate is also complementary with the HRC’s other mechanisms, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, providing a distinct but mutually reinforcing focus on the human rights situation inside the Russian Federation. This ensures that scrutiny of Russia’s domestic human rights situation occurs alongside, but separate from, accountability processes related to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We therefore call on your delegation to support the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation at HRC60 and ensure that the mandate is provided with the necessary resources to continue effective, rigorous, and independent monitoring and reporting.

Such renewal is critical to maintain close international scrutiny, to document the ongoing deterioration of human rights in Russia, and to ensure that the voices of victims and defenders are heard and not silenced.

Respectfully,

- Amnesty International
- CIVICUS
- Civil Society Forum (Board)
- Freedom House
- Free Russia Foundation
- Human Rights House Foundation
- Human Rights Watch
- International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Federation for Human Rights
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
- Stichting Justice Initiative
- World Organization against Torture (OMCT)