

## **STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE CIVIC SOLIDARITY PLATFORM REGARDING THE LIQUIDATION OF THE MOSCOW HELSINKI GROUP**

30 January 2023

We, non-governmental organisations – members of the international Civic Solidarity Platform, condemn the decision of the authorities of the Russian Federation to liquidate the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), a member and one of the founders of our network. MHG is the oldest Russian human rights organisation, a pioneering organisation within the human rights movement in our region and a symbol of the fight against totalitarianism, protection of human rights and the implementation of the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

On January 25, 2023, the Moscow City Court issued a decision on the liquidation of the MHG. The formal basis for this decision is that the MHG had participated in activities outside the region of its registration (Moscow), in particular, by holding events outside Moscow, as well as sending complaints on human rights violations to the state authorities in other regions. In addition, the lawsuit of the Ministry of Justice on the basis of which the court decision was issued, states that the MHG violated the prescribed schedule of meetings of its governing bodies (twice a year). According to Russian legislation, it is unlawful to continue the activities of a liquidated organisation.

The MHG was not given the opportunity to challenge the claims of the Ministry of Justice. Before the Moscow City Court issued its ruling, the Gagarinsky District Court of Moscow rejected a request by the MHG to consider the lawfulness of the inspection, during which the Ministry of Justice found the alleged violations the organisation is accused of. The MHG was banned from publishing the court ruling on this issue.

Clearly, such a harsh and extreme measure as the liquidation of an organisation is not a proportionate penalty for the formal violations allegedly committed by the MHG. The court's conclusion that activities undertaken by the organisation outside of the region of its registration is a violation appears to be absurd and illegitimate. The court decision violates international legal obligations of the Russian Federation on the right to freedom of association and the fair trial guarantees as the MHG was deprived of the opportunity to challenge the actions of state bodies taken against it.

The liquidation of the MHG is part of the systematic policy of the Russian authorities to suppress critical voices and eliminate independent civil society against the background of the aggressive war, started by Russia against Ukraine. These repressive actions are gaining momentum and include the persecution by the Russian authorities of other leading Russian human rights organisations such as the liquidation of the International Society "Memorial" and Human Rights Center "Memorial", the imposition of huge fines and the seizure of the property of "Memorial" and the Sakharov Center, a significant tightening of the legislation

on “foreign agents” at the end of last year, etc. The liquidation of the MHG is a clear reprisal for the organisation’s consistent stance on Russia’s aggression and calls for accountability, as well as for many years of its legitimate human rights work.

It is important to emphasize that the MHG is not only the oldest Russian human rights organisation. Its creation marked the beginning of the institutionalisation of the dissident movement in the USSR. The MHG is a symbol of this movement. The organisation was established in 1976 at the initiative of the famous Soviet dissident, physicist Yuri Orlov. The declaration on the creation of the MHG was printed at Andrei Sakharov's apartment. The MHG’s activities began with the issuance of information bulletin and appeals that focused on violations of the articles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and were aimed at drawing attention to human rights violations in the USSR and compelling the Soviet government to fulfill the human rights commitments it had undertaken. The international Helsinki movement and national Helsinki committees in Europe and the USA were created in solidarity with soviet dissidents, and firstly with Yuri Orlov after he had been sent to a prison colony for his human rights engagement.

We demand that the Russian authorities stop persecuting the MHG for its legitimate activities on human rights protection and put an end to the ongoing campaign of repression against Russian civil society organisations. We call on the international community, including democratic states, the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, to continue their support for Russian civil society, including NGOs, independent media and human rights defenders.

We express our full solidarity with colleagues at the MHG and all Russian human rights defenders, facing pressure and persecution by Russian authorities. Human rights have no borders, solidarity is stronger than repression.

#### **Signatures:**

1. Belarusian Helsinki Committee
2. Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
3. Centre de la protection internationale (France)
4. Crude Accountability (USA)
5. Protection of Rights Without Borders (Armenia)
6. Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
7. Turkmen Helsinki Foundation
8. Macedonian Helsinki Committee
9. Swedish OSCE Network
10. Netherlands Helsinki Committee
11. Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan
12. Albanian Helsinki Committee
13. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
14. Legal Policy Research Center (Kazakhstan)

15. Swiss Helsinki Committee
16. Human Rights House Foundation (Norway)
17. Human Rights Center (Georgia)
18. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
19. International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
20. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor (Armenia)
21. Austausch – For a European Civil Society (International)
22. Citizens' Watch (Russia)
23. Public Verdict (Russia)
24. Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
25. Hungarian Helsinki Committee
26. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
27. Kharkiv Regional Foundation Public Alternative (Ukraine)
28. Legal Initiative (Belarus)
29. UNITED for Intercultural Action (International)
30. Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
31. SOVA Center (Russia)
32. Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM (Serbia)
33. Public Foundation "Notabene" (Tajikistan)
34. Human rights center "Viasna" (Belarus)
35. Public Association "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)
36. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
37. Human Rights Defense Center "Memorial" (Russia)
38. Public organization "Dawn" (Tajikistan)
39. Freedom Files (Poland)
40. humanrights.ch (Switzerland)
41. Norwegian Helsinki Committee
42. Crew Against Torture (Russia)
43. Lawtrend (Belarus)
44. Promo LEX Association (Moldova)
45. Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
46. Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
47. IDP Women Association "Consent" (Georgia)