

Statement against persecution of lawyers and human rights defenders in occupied Crimea

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, are highly concerned at information published by the Russian media indicating that the Russian Ministry of Justice has called for Crimean human rights lawyer Emil Kurbedinov to be expelled from the de-facto Crimean Central Bar Association before March 2019.

We believe that this call is linked to his professional activity as well as his civic activism. Emil Kurbedinov represents the interests of the Ukrainian prisoners held captive by the Russian authorities, including the Ukrainian sailors captured by Russian forces in November 2018 as well as others who allege having been tortured by the Occupying authorities (Renat Paralamov) or abducted (Ervin Ibrahimov, Mukhtar Arislanov, Timur Shaimardanov). Possible disbarment will deprive Emil of the possibility to practice law and deprive Emil's clients, who have been subjected to politically motivated persecution, of the effective assistance.

We strongly condemn the ongoing persecution of lawyers and human rights defenders in occupied Crimea and demand that the Russian Federation government immediately ceases the unlawful obstruction of lawyers' work and human rights activities, as well as the use of Russia's "anti-extremism and anti-terrorism" legislation on the occupied territory, to persecute individuals for their public, legal and human rights activities. Such actions by the Russian Federation violate international humanitarian law.

We call on international organisations and foreign governments:

- To continue pressure on the government of the Russian Federation to put a stop to the persecution of Crimean independent lawyer Emil Kurbedinov and other human rights lawyers and defenders;
- To continue pressure on the Russian Federation to cease persecution of Crimean Solidarity¹ and Ukrainian Cultural Center activists in occupied Crimea.
- To condemn the use by Russia of its own "anti-terrorism and anti-extremism" legislation to prosecute lawyers, human rights defenders and civil society activists in occupied Crimea.
- To impose personal sanctions on persons involved in gross violations of human rights in occupied Crimea, as well as on those directly involved in the obstruction of lawyers' activities. In particular, impose personal sanctions against Russian Minister of Justice Alexandr Konovalov, the de facto Minister of Justice of the so-called Crimean Republic Oleg Shapovalov, representatives of the occupying law enforcement agencies, namely, Andrei Sushko, Federal Security Service, and Ruslan Shambazov, Ministry of Interior, who are both linked to the persecution of Emil Kurbedinov, as well as other Ukrainian citizens, persecuted for political motives, as well as with the cases involving the alleged use of torture such as the cases of Renat Paralamov and Oleksander Kostenko.
- To strengthen sectoral sanctions against the Russian Federation for systematic gross violations of human rights and war crimes in occupied Crimea.

¹ Crimean Solidarity is a platform that brings together relatives and lawyers of political prisoners, providing legal, financial and moral support to victims of the regime and their families.

It should be noted that this is not the first case when Emil Kurbedinov has been subjected to persecution by the Russian authorities.

On 6 December 2018 Emil Kurbedinov was detained by officials of the Center for Combating Extremism in Crimea under Article 20.3 of the Russian Federation Code of Administrative Offences (propaganda or public display of Nazi attributes or symbols, or attributes or symbols of extremist organizations, or other attributes or symbols, propaganda or public display of which is prohibited by federal laws). He was sentenced to five days' imprisonment by the de facto Kiev District Court of Simferopol.

In August 2016, while Emil was in Rostov-on-Don, unknown individuals tried to break into his office.

On 26 January 2017, he was detained by a group of masked representatives from the Center for Combating Extremism in Crimea and taken to a local office of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) for interrogation, and on the same day, the de-facto Zheleznodorozhny District Court of Simferopol found him guilty of "propagandizing for extremist organizations" and sentenced to ten days' detention. Following his arrest, officials conducted searches at his house and office (as well as at the office of human rights defender Edem Semedliayev, Emil's colleague) and all electronic equipment was seized. The lawyer's arrest caused a strong reaction from the international community, including Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

On 27 October 2018, representatives of the occupying authorities in Crimea stormed a monthly meeting of the NGO Crimean Solidarity and handed lawyers Edem Semedliayev and Lilya Gemedji and Crimean Solidarity coordinator Diliaver Memetov notices regarding so-called violation of anti-extremism and anti-terrorism law.

Furthermore, in November 2018, a representative of the Center for Combating Extremism in Crimea together with the de-facto prosecutor Valentyn Chuprina came to Emil Kurbedinov's office and issued him with a warning against violating anti-extremism laws.

These incidents represent systematic pressure on the independent lawyers and human rights defenders in occupied Crimea. Over the past few years, at least three Crimean Tatar human rights activists were detained following politically-motivated criminal charges.

Emil Kurbedinov is an outspoken human rights lawyer in Crimea – in 2017 he was awarded the Front Line Defenders award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk in recognition of his human rights work.

Signatories:

Association UMDPL (Ukraine)
Belarusian Helsinki Committee (Belarus)
Bur Duino (Kyrgyzstan)
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
Citizens' Watch (Russia)
Civil Assistance Committee (Russia)
Crimean Human Rights Group (Ukraine)
CrimeaSOS (Ukraine)
Crude Accountability (United States)
Euromaidan Press (Ukraine)
German Russian Exchange – DRA (Germany)
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Human Rights Center (Azerbaijan)

Twitter: [/twitter.com/CivicSolidarity](https://twitter.com/CivicSolidarity)

Facebook: [/www.facebook.com/CivicSolidarity](https://www.facebook.com/CivicSolidarity)

Instagram: [/www.instagram.com/civic_solidarity](https://www.instagram.com/civic_solidarity)

YouTube: [/www.youtube.com/user/CivicSolidarity](https://www.youtube.com/user/CivicSolidarity)

Human Rights House Foundation (Norway)
Human Rights Information Center (Ukraine)
Human Rights Matter (Germany)
Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
humanrights.ch (Switzerland)
IDP Women Association "Consent" (Georgia)
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)
KRF Public Alternative (Ukraine)
Legal Transformation Center (Belarus)
Macedonian Helsinki Committee (Macedonia)
Media Initiative for Human Rights (Ukraine)
Netherlands Helsinki Committee (The Netherlands)
People in Need (Czech Republic)
Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Promo LEX (Moldova)
Public Association "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)
Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)
Regional Center for Human Rights (Ukraine)
SOLIDARUS (Germany)
The Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims - GCRT (Georgia)
The Human Rights Center "Viasna" (Belarus)
The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)
The Swedish OSCE Network (Sweden)
Truth Hounds (Ukraine/Georgia)
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)