

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 233 8695

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

23 August 2023

Russia: Three human rights defenders and members of the human rights movement Golos arrested following raids against 12 of Golos' representatives

On 17 August 2023, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation opened two separate criminal cases against members of the Moscow-based election monitoring human rights movement **Golos**, human rights defenders **Grigory Melkonyants** and **Natalia Guseva**. Police also arrested one of the movement's coordinators, human rights defender **Vladimir Yegorov**, who will remain in detention for 15 days for his alleged "resistance of a lawful order of the police." Natalia Guseva was subjected to questioning and released on the same day. On 18 August 2023, Basmany District Court of the City of Moscow sanctioned the arrest of Grigory Melkonyants, who will remain in pre-trial detention until 17 October 2023. The investigations and arrests followed mass raids of the houses of 12 people associated with the human rights movement Golos.

[Golos](#), or the Movement for Defence of Voters' Rights, is a Russian-based human rights movement which works to protect electoral rights and transparency in Russia. Since its establishment in 2000, Golos has trained election observers, provided legal assistance to voters, and conducted long- and short-term election observation. In its work, Golos is guided by international electoral standards and strictly abides by the principle of political neutrality as one of the main conditions for independent and objective election observation.

On 18 August 2023, the Basmany District Court of the City of Moscow sanctioned the arrest of the co-chair of Golos, human rights defender and lawyer [Grigory Melkonyants](#) for two months, until 17 October 2023. This followed a raid on his apartment on 17 August 2023, during which the authorities seized Grigory Melkonyants' travel documents. The human rights defender is considered a suspect in a criminal case related to "organising the activities of an undesirable organisation," which is being handled by the Head of the Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

On 17 August 2023, law enforcement officers carried out a series of house raids against 12 people, currently or formerly affiliated with the Golos movement, who reside in eight regions across Russia. After a raid on her apartment, the authorities charged the chairperson of the Chelyabinsk branch, woman human rights defender [Natalia Guseva](#), with so-called "discrediting of the armed forces of the Russian Federation," a criminal offence under Article 207.3, part 1, of the Russian Criminal Code. The Golos movement believes the "discrediting" charges against her are targeted at interfering with Golos' work. During the questioning, she was also asked about the activities of the movement. On the same day, law enforcement officials also arrested one of the Moscow-based movement's coordinators, human rights defender [Vladimir Yegorov](#). He is to remain arrested for 15 days for his alleged "resistance of a lawful order of the police," an administrative offence under Article 19.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences.

In Moscow, police raided the houses of human rights defenders Vladimir Zhilkin, Grigory Melkonyants and Vladimir Yegorov. In Saint Petersburg, the authorities raided the apartment of woman human rights defender Polina Kostyleva, who is a local coordinator of the Golos movement. In Chelyabinsk, they raided the house of woman human rights defender Natalia Guseva, who is the chairperson of the regional section of Golos, as well as former election monitor and civic activist Ildar Baimuratov. In Ryazan, they targeted Golos coordinator and woman human

Front Line Defenders Board of Directors

Denis O'Brien, Jim Conway, Roja Fazaeli, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real (Philippines), David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Verónica Vidal (Uruguay)

Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Maryam Elahi, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani, Mary Lawlor

Front Line, The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights

Defenders trading as Front Line Defenders, is registered in Ireland as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Registered Office: First Floor, Avoca Court, Temple Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland.

Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404

rights defender Sofia Ivanova. In Voronezh, raids were carried out against human rights defender and Golos coordinator Vladislav Khodakovskiy and former election monitor and political activist Pavel Sychev. In Kirov, the police raided the apartment of a member of Golos' board, human rights defender Denis Shadrin, and his colleague Polina Kuskova. In Velikii Novgorod, the authorities raided the apartment of ex-Golos representative Ksenia Cherepanova who is now a member of one of Russia's opposition political parties, Yabloko.

The law enforcement officers used physical violence against the human rights defender Vladimir Zhilikin, who was hit in the head and had to go to the emergency room. After the visit to the ER, he was brought into the police precinct for questioning and released on the same day. Denis Shadrin and Polina Kuskova, Golos representatives from Kirov, were brought to the local section of the Centre for Combating Extremism (Centre E) and released in the evening. They were all subjected to interrogations regarding the work of Golos and ENEMO.

Most of the raids are believed to have been sanctioned by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, investigating alleged "organisation of the work of an undesirable organisation," a criminal offence envisioned by Article 284.1, part 3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. While the Russian authorities never officially listed Golos as an "undesirable organisation," in 2021 the Office of the Prosecutor General listed the European Network of Election Monitoring Organisations (ENEMO). Golos used to be an ENEMO member and, despite the movement's withdrawing from ENEMO as soon as the network was listed as undesirable, the Russian authorities nevertheless continues targeting Golos and its members through the framework of legislation on "undesirable organisations," as well as through other means. Throughout the raids, the police seized various personal pieces of equipment and documents related to the work of Golos and asked many questions about the work of Golos. They also asked questions about ENEMO, seemingly equating the two organisations.

The orchestrated attack against Golos and its members comes just a few months before the beginning of the campaigning period for the upcoming Russian electoral cycles, which include presidential elections. In a letter passed through his lawyer, the human rights defender Grigory Melkonyants stated that Golos has traditionally experienced growing pressure from state authorities during election periods. Such pressure includes criminal and administrative prosecutions against members, threats and defamation, and the listing of the movement as a foreign agent.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned by the systemic attack against current and former members of the human rights movement Golos and condemns the detention of three human rights defenders associated with the movement on criminal and administrative charges. Equally concerning is the targeting of Golos through the legislative framework that bans the activities of so-called "undesirable organisations," that has been disproportionately used by the Russian authorities to target human rights defenders for their legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders believes that the attack against Golos aims to intimidate and delegitimise the human rights organisation's work to promote good governance and fair election practices.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately cease all harassment against former and current representatives of the Golos human rights movement, as they are being targeted for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Immediately release human rights defenders Grigory Melkonyants, Natalia Guseva and Vladimir Yegorov, dropping all charges against them and ensuring their physical and psychological integrity while in custody;
3. Cease the targeting of Golos movement as an undesirable organisation, recognising its legal and operational autonomy;

4. Refrain from using security laws, including the laws on undesirable organisations and foreign agents, to target human rights defenders, lawyers, and their respective human rights organisations; and
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Russian Federation can carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Russian Federation's international human rights obligations and commitments.