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Crimea (Ukraine): Human rights lawyer **Aleksey Ladin** arrested for posting the national emblem of Ukraine and Crimean Tatars

On 13 October 2023, human rights defender **Aleksey Ladin** was detained in Russian-occupied Crimea and sentenced to 14 days of administrative detention for allegedly displaying prohibited symbols on his social media pages. He was also fined 45,000 rubles (440 euro) for discrediting the Russian military forces after he reshared a post which denounced Russian aggressions against Ukraine.

[Aleksey Ladin](#) is a Russian human rights defender and lawyer. Since 2015 he has been working to provide legal aid to Ukrainians who have been persecuted by Russia on politically motivated charges. He has worked both as a representative of human rights organisation Agora, then, following this, in an independent capacity. In 2017 he moved from the city of Tumen to Russian-occupied Crimea to be closer to his clients who, at that point, mostly consisted of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar political prisoners in Russian-occupied Crimea, as well as Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians who were abducted and charged with criminal offences by the Russian authorities.

On 13 October 2023, early in the morning, the human rights defender Aleksey Ladin was detained in Simferopol where he was defending a local resident accused of storing an explosive device. While he was at court, the human rights defender's house in Sevastopol was raided by Russian occupational law enforcement.

Later that day, the Kyivskiy district court of Simferopol examined two protocols concerning administrative offences against Aleksey Ladin, Ukrainian media outlet [Graty](#) reported. The first of these involved article 20.3, paragraph 1, of the Code of Administrative Offences of Russia, which prohibits the display of banned symbols – in relation to Facebook posts he published in 2018. The posts in question displayed an image which contained “taraq tamga” (the emblem on the Crimean Tatars’ flag) which the court deemed to be a symbol associated with a known Crimean volunteer paramilitary unit [Noman Çelebicihan Crimean Tatar Volunteer Battalion](#), which takes its name from the original founder of the Crimean Republic, Noman Çelebicihan.

The image published by the human rights defender Aleksey Ladin had no relation to the battalion. It was a photo of a drawing of one of his clients, Crimean Tatars, persecuted by Russian authorities. The image included elements of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar national emblems and was accompanied by the slogan “We are not the terrorists and we are not the extremists.”

The second protocol was linked to another post by the human rights defender Aleksey Ladin on Facebook which discussed the use of cluster munition bombs by the Russian Military in its attack on Kharkiv in the North of Ukraine. Russian law enforcement considers this post to send a message which discredits the Russian military forces (article 20.3.3, paragraph 1, of the Code of Administrative Offences of Russia).

On 13 October the Kyivskiy district court of Simferopol arrested the human rights defender Aleksey Ladin for 14 days for the display of prohibited symbols and fined him 45,000 rubles for discrediting the Russian army. The human rights defender was taken into custody directly from the courtroom.

On 17 October 2023 the Russian-controlled Supreme Court of Crimea [upheld](#) the ruling by the Kyivskiy district court of Simferopol on the arrest of lawyer Aleksey Ladin.

On 18 October 2023 the occupational Crimean department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia [stated](#) that it is planning to disbar Aleksey Ladin by applying to the Tumen Region Bar Association.

It should also be noted that this is not an isolated incident where a human rights lawyer has been persecuted in Russian-occupied Crimea. Rather, it is part of a broad and worrying trend in Crimea since its annexation in 2014. In 2022 the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation [disbarred](#) Crimean Tatar human rights lawyers [Lilia Hemedzhy](#), [Rustem Kyamilev](#) and [Nazim Sheikhmambetov](#). Prior to this, Crimean Tatar lawyer [Emil Kurbedinov](#), the winner of the 2017 Front Line Defender's Award, was put under administrative arrest at least twice (in [2017](#) and [2018](#)). Additionally, human rights lawyers in Russian-occupied Crimea have, on multiple occasions, been handed "[warnings](#)" for the alleged organisation of "extremist activities".

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of Aleksey Ladin and believes this to be a clear act of reprisal by authorities for his legitimate and peaceful work as a human rights lawyer. Front Line Defenders also believes that the expansion of the Russian Federation's Administrative and Criminal Codes to include the offences of "discrediting" the Russian military fosters a culture of censorship. These laws are being disproportionately used to target human rights defenders who are working in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately release human rights defender and lawyer Aleksey Ladin and drop all charges against him;
2. Repeal Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on "public circulation of fake information on the deployment of the Russian army and state bodies' execution of its powers" as it limits freedom of speech and disproportionately targets human rights defenders;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.