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### Russia: Human rights organisation Man and the Law shut down by court order

On 21 August 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mari El in the Russian Federation ruled to shut down the human rights organisation **Man and the Law**. According to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (MOJ), who initially filed a claim to shut down Man and the Law, the human rights organisation committed several “gross violations” that entail liquidation. Man and the Law will appeal the judgement.

[Man and the Law](#) is a regional human rights organisation based in Yoshkar-Ola in the Russian Republic of Mari El. The organisation is involved in monitoring places of detention and conducting investigations into human rights violations committed by government authorities, including law enforcement agencies. Man and the Law also provides legal and psychological assistance to victims of torture.

On 21 August 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mari El ruled to shut down the human rights organisation Man and the Law. At the end of 2022, the Russian MOJ commenced an unplanned review of the organisation’s activities, made possible by the fact that Man and the Law was listed as a foreign agent. The MOJ concluded that the organisation committed several so-called “gross violations”, including failure to mark their reports to the state authorities with the “foreign agents” label, issuing social media posts without labelling them as “foreign agent” posts, holding events outside of the region in which they were registered, and participating in activities that are allegedly not envisioned by Man and the Law’s charter. Such activities involved specifically working with vulnerable groups, such as drug users and those in need of HIV/AIDS prevention. The MOJ did not give Man and the Law an opportunity to address or fix these so-called violations, submitting a motion to the Supreme Court to shut down the human rights organisation.

According to Man and the Law, the MOJ failed to properly interpret the law when assessing the organisation. Regarding the prohibition of regional human rights organisations from holding events where they have no representation or offices, Man and the Law claim the goal of the legal provisions that classify organisations, including human rights organisations, into local, regional and interregional is not to limit their work to specific localities, but rather for the state to allocate benefits and social support measures to them at various corresponding levels.

With regards to the support for vulnerable groups, Man and the Law noted that protecting the right to health is included in the human rights organisation’s charter. The authorities, however, argued that the charter should have included specific wording concerning “persons living with HIV” and “drug users” in order to allow the organisation to engage in these activities. The organisation also argued that the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation previously [clarified](#) that a decision to shut down an NGO cannot be based solely on such violations. Liquidation could only be used as a measure under exceptional circumstances, when the organisation is proven to have caused “real harm,” such as war propaganda, incitement of national, racial or religious hatred, or calls for discrimination, hostility or violence. Man and the Law stated in court that the MOJ did not submit any evidence concerning “real harm” as per the Constitutional Court’s definition.

This is not the first time the authorities have attempted to shut down Man and the Law. In 2020, the MOJ filed an identical lawsuit after a routine inspection, in a then failed attempt to liquidate the human rights organisation.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of the human rights organisation Man and the Law by the Russian authorities and believes that this harassment is due to its peaceful and legitimate human rights work in the country. Front Line Defenders expresses grave concerns about the decision of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Mari El to shut down Man and the Law. Equally concerning is the practice of the Russian authorities of applying a restrictive interpretation of the law when deciding on the liquidation of human rights organisations, which has led to the shutting down of key civil society actors. Front Line Defenders reiterates its concern regarding the set of “foreign agent” laws in the Russian legal framework, as it places human rights defenders under increased risk and further hampers their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

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

1. Immediately revoke the decision to shut down the human rights organisation Man and the Law;
2. Refrain from using the laws on “foreign agents” against Man and the Law and other human rights organisations in Russia;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and their organisations in Russia are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with the Russian Federation’s international human rights obligations and commitments.