

**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

27 June 2023

Russia: International human rights group Agora listed as “undesirable organisation”

On 19 June 2023, the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation declared the international human rights group **Agora** and its Bulgaria-based legal entity the Law Sofia Foundation as “undesirable organisations.” Under Russia’s existing law on “undesirable organisations,” the Prosecutor’s office can ban any foreign organisation that it considers as undermining Russia’s security or constitutional order.

The international human rights group [Agora](#) is an organisation consisting of over fifty human rights lawyers working on landmark human rights cases across Russia. Agora’s work includes cases of torture, deaths of imprisoned individuals, LGBTIQ+ rights, as well as attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers. Agora’s lawyers have won more than thirty cases in the European Court of Human Rights against the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation listed Agora as a “foreign agent” in 2014. In 2016, Agora was liquidated by the Supreme Court of Tatarstan, after a review by the Ministry of Justice which claimed to identify numerous grave violations in Agora’s operations, including of the “foreign agents” law. In March 2023, the Ministry of Justice also listed the head of Agora, the human rights defender and lawyer Pavel Chikov, as a foreign agent.

On 19 June 2023, the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation labelled the Law Sofia Foundation, Agora’s Bulgaria-based legal entity, and the international human rights group Agora itself, as “undesirable organisations.” According to a [statement](#) posted on the website of the Prosecutor General’s Office, the organisation’s activities “threaten the foundations of the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation.” The authorities added that the organisation “focuses on highlighting and replicating facts of so-called violations of the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens.” The statement indicates that the targeting of Agora is a result of its human rights work.

According to Article 284.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, carrying out the activities of an “undesirable organisation” shall be punished with a prison sentence up to 6 years. Furthermore, repeated participation in the activities of an “undesirable organisation,” including receiving legal help from such an organisation, also constitutes a criminal offence. The list of “undesirable organisations” now contains eighty-eight entries, including mostly international civil society organisations, Russian political dissent groups and some national human rights groups that have had to register outside of Russia.

Front Line Defenders condemns the listing of Agora as undesirable as it believes it is in direct reprisal against the organisation’s legitimate and non-violent human rights work. Front Line Defenders further condemns the Russian authorities’ use of security laws, including the “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations” laws, to radically suppress the work of human rights organisations in Russia. Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to stop their continued attack against human rights defenders and organisations, which is aimed at completely dismantling the human rights work in the country.

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

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

1. Immediately revoke the decision to declare the international human rights group Agora and its legal entity the Law Sofia Foundation as “undesirable organisations”;
2. Cease using the laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations” to judicially harass Agora and other human rights organisations in Russia for their human rights work;
3. Repeal the laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations”, as the authorities use them to disproportionately target lawyers and human rights defenders, as well as their respective human rights organisations;
4. 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.