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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova, submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution [57/20](#).

* The present document was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova

Rule of fear: silencing dissent and anti-war expression in the Russian Federation in the name of national security

Summary

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur examines how public safety and national security legislation in the Russian Federation is abused as a tool in its strategy for suppressing dissent and anti-war expression. The inconsistencies between domestic laws related to counter-terrorism, extremism, espionage and treason, and binding international human rights obligations, including violations of the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, are outlined. The Special Rapporteur reveals an alarming escalation since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022, marked by the abuse of legislation and judicial harassment targeting civil society actors, journalists, lawyers, political figures and ordinary citizens expressing views critical of the war. The report contains evidence of widespread and systematic arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment, deaths in custody, incommunicado detention and prosecution of prisoners of war and civilian Ukrainians, held by the Russian authorities on counter-terrorism, espionage and treason charges. The Special Rapporteur provides recommendations for the Russian authorities and the international community.

I. Introduction

1. In her second thematic report,¹ submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 57/20, the Special Rapporteur focuses especially on the period following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, during which the abuse of national security and public safety laws dramatically intensified.
2. This extensive abuse of counter-terrorism, extremism, treason, espionage and other national security-related provisions in the Russian Criminal Code disproportionately targets dissent, anti-war expression and peaceful protest protected under international law. This legal tool has been turned into a deliberate, widespread and systematic strategy to suppress independent voices, dismantle civil society and consolidate authoritarian control, in stark violation of the obligations of the Russian Federation under international law.
3. Peaceful anti-war activists and civil society actors, journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, political figures, and ordinary citizens critical of the Government have faced ongoing persecution. Religious minorities, LGBT persons,² Indigenous Peoples and national minorities have similarly been targeted for challenging the official narrative on “traditional values” and “national identity”. This pattern extends to prosecuting and imprisoning children for legitimate expression of dissent.
4. Of additional concern is the abuse of Russian public safety and national security legislation against detained Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians, including those forcibly transferred within the occupied territories or deported to the Russian Federation. Many have been sentenced to lengthy imprisonment on charges of extremism, terrorism, espionage and treason as punishment for belonging to or on suspicion of supporting the Ukrainian army, violating the absolute prohibition of enforced disappearance, torture and coerced confessions, and fair trial guarantees.

II. Methodology

5. The Special Rapporteur’s efforts to engage with the Russian authorities and requests for country visits have remained unanswered.³ Consequently, the present report is based on information received from a wide variety of sources and an extensive review of Russian legislation alongside its obligations under binding international human rights treaties.
6. Submissions were received from human rights organizations, and consultations were held with defence lawyers, human rights defenders, Indigenous Peoples groups and wider civil society representatives.⁴ Information was received from victims and witnesses, including first-hand testimonies of individuals who have been sentenced and served prison terms on politically motivated charges, torture victims and their families, and Russians in exile facing criminal prosecution in absentia. In the report, the Special Rapporteur also draws from court documents, official records and statistics, and open sources.
7. Due to space limitations, only a few illustrative cases could be included. However, the Special Rapporteur is aware of multiple examples showing the serious,

¹ Supplemental to [A/HRC/57/59](#).

² Throughout the present report, the acronym “LGBT” should be read as inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse persons.

³ See https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/2045795.

⁴ The present report is based on an analysis of the information received from victims of human rights violations and other sources from inside and outside the Russian Federation, including during consultations. The original submissions to the mandate are on file with the Secretariat.

widespread and systematic abuse of public safety and national security legislation to silence dissent in the Russian Federation.

III. Instrumentalizing national security and public safety laws: the strategy of the Russian Federation to suppress dissent

A. Abuse of national security legislation

Treason

8. Since February 2022, treason, as defined under article 275 of the Criminal Code, has been transformed from a narrowly applied provision into a broad instrument of political repression. Before the war, the number of treason cases averaged 10 to 15 annually, involving individuals with access to State secrets. Notable politically motivated prosecutions included that of journalist Ivan Safronov, who was arrested in July 2020 and sentenced to 22 years for alleged collaboration with the Czech intelligence services.

9. After 2022, cases under article 275 surged, resulting in 167 verdicts in 2023, 361 in 2024 and 232 by July 2025 – a nearly 33-fold increase from pre-war figures – with 774 individuals prosecuted under treason-related articles. This increase followed the July 2022 expansion of treason charges to include “switching to the enemy’s side”,⁵ accounting for 59 per cent of prosecutions, often targeting individuals accused of trying to join Ukrainian forces or showing support online. No acquittals have been recorded, and at least nine individuals have died in custody. Trials are conducted both in the Russian Federation and in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Their closed nature and underreporting suggest that the real numbers are higher.

10. Since 2023, even small financial donations to Ukrainian entities have become punishable as “treason”. In April 2024, Nina Slobodchikova received 12 years’ imprisonment for donating \$50 to a Ukrainian blogger’s account a year earlier.

11. Expanded treason provisions, rising prosecutions, arbitrary arrests, lengthy sentencing and torture reflect a systematic effort to suppress dissent under the guise of national security protection. The April 2023 amendment raising the maximum penalty for treason to life imprisonment reinforces this repressive trajectory.⁶

Confidential cooperation with a foreign State

12. Article 275.1, introduced in July 2022⁷ and amended in December 2024,⁸ criminalizes “confidential cooperation” with foreign States or organizations deemed harmful to Russian security. It applies to Russian citizens and foreigners and does not require the transfer of classified information or direct collaboration with intelligence services. Ordinary interactions, such as private communication, or sharing non-secret information and political views with foreign entities, may be treated as security threats. Carrying up to eight years’ imprisonment, it has become a versatile tool for suppressing dissent, often targeting individuals with Ukrainian ties.

13. Convictions under article 275.1 rose from 3 in 2023 to 48 in 2024, with 25 more by July 2025, showing its rapid normalization as a tool of political repression. In August 2024, dual Russian-Ukrainian citizen Pyotr Opalnik was sentenced to eight

⁵ Federal law No. 260-FZ of 14 July 2022.

⁶ Federal law No. 157-FZ of 28 April 2023.

⁷ Federal law No. 260-FZ of 14 July 2024.

⁸ Federal law No. 510-FZ of 28 December 2024.

years, entirely on the basis of a private conversation with a relative about a military summons for mobilization, whom he allegedly sought to persuade to surrender.

14. The evidentiary basis in these cases is deeply flawed. Courts admit private messages, conversations and social media posts as evidence. The threshold for prosecution is low, intent is inferred rather than demonstrated, defendants are often unaware that their actions could be criminalized, and the authorities rely on digital surveillance and entrapment to build cases.

Espionage

15. Article 276, on espionage, was changed to broaden its scope for political repression following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. In July 2022, espionage was expanded to include gathering, transferring or storing information for use against Russian forces, regardless of classification status,⁹ allowing the broadest possible interpretation and prosecution of legitimate activities, such as journalism.

16. The application of article 276 expanded rapidly, from zero cases in 2022 to 69 in 2023 (84 defendants), 60 cases in 2024 (68 defendants) and 30 more by July 2025. Between 2023 and July 2025, there were 159 cases with 182 individuals convicted, compared with just five in the period 2021–2022. Espionage charges are often paired with “terrorism”-related charges for harsher sentences.

17. Targets include Russian dissenters and Ukrainian nationals, for actions such as sharing information on social media or contacting relatives in Ukraine. In January 2025, Ukrainian citizen Ivan Zabavsky was sentenced to 11 years’ imprisonment in a closed-door trial, after being detained by Russian forces in the Russian-occupied Kharkiv region while searching for his missing mother. Zabavsky reported being tortured to extract confessions incriminating him of transferring information to Ukrainian security services. In June 2024, Yulia Kovesnikova received 13 years’ imprisonment for allegedly sharing information with her husband, a Ukrainian soldier. Neither had access to State secrets.

Aiding the enemy

18. Article 276.1, introduced in December 2024 as another provision in of the Russian Federation repressive toolbox, criminalizes providing “financial, material-technical or other aid to an enemy”. It targets non-Russian citizens with penalties of 10 to 15 years’ imprisonment.

State secrets

19. Article 283 criminalizes “the disclosure of State secrets” by anyone in possession of classified information. Since 2022, new provisions have been added, such as article 283.2 on “violations of the protection of State secrets”, often used to punish unauthorized foreign travel by those with access to State secrets. While prosecutions under article 283 remain largely confined to State employees and military personnel, the number of convictions grew from 66 in 2022 to 74 in 2024. By contrast, the number of convictions under article 283.2 has expanded rapidly from 70 in 2023 to 130 in 2024.

Other abuses of national security-related legislation to suppress dissent

20. In 2022, Russian authorities introduced new “war censorship” provisions, including Criminal Code article 207.3 on “fake news” and article 280.3 on the

⁹ Federal law No. 260-FZ of 14 July 2022.

“discreditation” of Russian armed forces,¹⁰ criminalizing dissent and war-related reporting,¹¹ resulting in prosecutions such as the sentencing of the Co-Chair of the human rights organization Memorial, Oleg Orlov, in February 2024 to two and a half years’ imprisonment for “discrediting” the army in a 2022 anti-war essay.¹² Also in 2024, articles 284.2 on “advocacy for sanctions” and 284.3 on “assistance in implementing decisions by foreign State authorities or international organizations to which the Russian Federation is not a party” were introduced, further broadening the tools for repression through vague wording and broad scope.¹³

21. In 2022, the labelling of “undesirable organizations”¹⁴ was expanded from targeting selected foreign organizations – as of February 2022, there were 50 organizations on the list – to a broad tool for suppressing independent media, prominent human rights and civil society organizations, world-renowned educational institutions and even humanitarian actors.¹⁵ By August 2025, 258 organizations had been designated as “undesirable”, with their operations banned and engagement with them criminalized inside the Russian Federation and abroad.¹⁶ In May 2025, Grigory Melkonyants, Co-Chair of the election watchdog Golos, received five years’ imprisonment on accusations of organizing the activities of an “undesirable organization”.¹⁷

22. Criminal Code article 282, on “hate speech” and actions that “humiliate the dignity of a protected person or a group”, has been used to target dissenters, especially for social media posts or commentary critical of government officials. Amendments to the article in June 2025 expanded the list of aggravated circumstances for which first-time offenders can be prosecuted¹⁸ to include “incitement or justification of violence”, enhancing the risk of politically motivated prosecutions to eliminate speech critical of the State.¹⁹

23. Under article 282, Russian authorities classify State officials, soldiers and mercenaries as “protected persons or groups”, using this provision to prosecute speech critical of them. Poets Artyom Kamardin and Yegor Shtovba were sentenced to seven and five and a half years’ imprisonment, respectively, under that article and article 280.4 on “calls to activity against State security” for public recital of their anti-war poetry in September 2022. Kamardin testified in court that he had been tortured, including gang rape by two police officers on arrest, but no criminal case into his torture had been opened to date.²⁰

24. Article 354.1 on the “rehabilitation of Nazism”, originally intended to criminalize the denial and glorification of Nazi crimes, has been expanded to include vague concepts such as “disrespect” for Russian World War II victory symbols or questioning of State-approved historical narratives, distorting historical truth about

¹⁰ Federal laws Nos. 31-FZ and 32-FZ of 4 March 2022.

¹¹ European Court of Human Rights, *Novaya Gazeta and Others v. Russia*, Application Nos. 35023/13 and 25657/15, Judgment, 10 January 2023.

¹² See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/russia-oleg-orlov-trial-abuse-legal-system-political-purposes-says-un-expert.

¹³ A/HRC/57/59, paras. 79–80.

¹⁴ Federal law No. 129-FZ of 3 June 2015.

¹⁵ See communication RUS 6/2024, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29248>.

¹⁶ <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7756/>. Access from outside the Russian Federation to this website requires the use of a virtual private network (VPN).

¹⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/un-expert-calls-accountability-and-justice-two-years-after-russias-invasion.

¹⁸ Federal law No. 173-FZ, of 24 June 2025.

¹⁹ Submission received from Russian human rights organization SOVA Centre.

²⁰ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/russia-un-expert-calls-poets-jailed-free-speech-clampdown-be-freed.

Stalinist and Soviet-era crimes. Since 2022, it has been increasingly used to silence dissent and prosecute critics of the war and State-approved history. In 2024 alone, some 55 criminal cases were opened under this article.

B. Abuse of public safety legislation

Terrorism

25. The Russian legal framework on counter-terrorism is formed by the 2006 federal law “on countering terrorism”,²¹ presidential decrees,²² several articles of the Criminal Code under chapter 24 on “crimes against public safety”, and provisions of the Code of Administrative Offences.

26. The definition of terrorism in Russian law is partly aligned with Security Council resolutions and international standards, but the inclusion by the Russian Federation of ambiguous terms extends the punishment beyond conduct that is terrorist in nature, and it is applied to punish legitimate exercise of human rights.²³

27. Since February 2022, terrorism charges have increased sixfold, due to the disproportionate prosecution of “hooliganism” or “vandalism” as terrorism. Arson attacks on military commissariats, attempted damage to railway infrastructure and other anti-war or pro-Ukrainian actions face prosecution as terrorist offences.

28. Article 205.2, on the “justification or propaganda of terrorism”, is the most frequently used counter-terrorism provision, criminalizing speech in the absence of violent intent and conduct. The number of prosecutions rose from 220 in 2021 to 549 in 2024, and to 373 by the beginning of July 2025. Many cases involve children and young people.

29. Articles 205.4 and 205.5 criminalize participation in “terrorist communities” and “terrorist organizations”, respectively. In practice, convictions often provide little evidence that defendants posed any threat of violent actions and are instead used to target civil society organizations and religious or minority communities.

30. Article 205.6, criminalizing the “failure to report terrorist-related offences”, was expanded in April 2025 to cover “sabotage” offences under articles 281–281.3 in the list of acts requiring mandatory reporting. The expansion risks increasing prosecutions, which have averaged 80 convictions per year since 2022.

31. The 2006 federal counter-terrorism law of the Russian Federation²⁴ provides the Federal Security Service with exceptional powers during a declared counter-terrorism operation, exempting it from external oversight, which heightens the risk of torture and fuelling impunity.

Extremism

32. The law “on countering extremist activity”,²⁵ together with Code of Administrative Offences and Criminal Code provisions, provides the legal framework for criminalizing “extremism”, defined as prohibited conduct, including certain forms of speech and symbols, with no clear links to “violence” as provided in international law and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

²¹ Federal law No. 35-FZ of 6 March 2006,

²² Presidential Decrees Nos. 116 of 15 February 2006 and 683 of 31 December 2015.

²³ See communication RUS 26/2023, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28580>.

²⁴ Federal law No. 35-FZ of 06 March 2006.

²⁵ Federal law No. 114-FZ of 25 July 2002.

33. Criminal Code article 280, on “public calls for extremist activity”, is most often used to prosecute anti-war dissent, with over 90 per cent of prosecutions targeting online activity. Prosecuted statements are often emotional or symbolic, including graffiti and slogans such as “Overthrow Putin! Stop the war!”.

34. Prosecutors often stack charges by pairing article 280 with article 205.2, on the “justification of terrorism”, to harshen penalties and deepen the chilling effect on the society. This creates an explicit overlap between counter-terrorism and counter-extremism frameworks, making it impossible to distinguish between them.

35. Since 2022, articles 282.1–282.3 that criminalize organizing “an extremist community” or the “activity of an extremist organization” and participating in or financing an “extremist” entity have been widely used against minorities, political opposition and civil society organizations.

36. In April 2025, legislation significantly expanded the scope for trials in absentia to include “extremism”- and “terrorism”-related crimes, extending the repressive reach of the Russian Federation to exiled dissidents.²⁶ In 2024, journalist Alexander Nevzorov and his wife were declared an “extremist community” by a court ruling issued in absentia.

37. The legislative amendments of July 2025 on “extremism” permit the designation of any group as “extremist” if one of its members is convicted under Criminal Code article 282.1 on “organizing and participating in an extremist community”.²⁷ Additional 2025 amendments criminalize online searches for “extremist materials”, including the use of virtual private networks, which significantly expands surveillance-based punishment and legal tools for repression.²⁸

VI. Human rights violations in the name of national security

“Terrorists” and “extremists” lists

38. The Russian Federation maintains several registries under the counter-terrorism and extremism frameworks, namely the “unified federal list of terrorist organizations” of the Federal Security Service, the “list of extremist organizations” of the Ministry of Justice, and the “list of terrorists and extremists” of Rosfinmonitoring, which contains both organizations and individuals. Placement on these three lists implicates a range of human rights, including the freedoms of movement, association and expression, the rights to privacy, property, health, due process and family life, and social and economic rights, including the right to work.

39. As of August 2025, the “unified federal list of terrorist organizations” contained 69 organizations, yet the Russian Federation had removed Taliban from the list in April 2025, having adopted a law to allow its removal a year before. As of the same month, the “list of extremist organizations” included 123 entries, while the “list of terrorists and extremists”, by far the largest, included 18,261 individuals, among them over 150 children, and 819 organizations. The growth of that list has been rapid: 1,607 individuals were added in 2022, 1,828 in 2023 and 3,152 in 2024.

40. Amendments to the law in December 2024 expanded the criteria for inclusion in the “list of terrorists and extremists”.²⁹ Designation enables Russian authorities to freeze bank accounts without a court order, bans real estate transactions and the

²⁶ Federal law No. 101-FZ of 21 April 2025.

²⁷ Federal law No. 216-FZ of 23 July 2025.

²⁸ Federal law No. 281-FZ of 31 July 2025.

²⁹ Federal law No. 522-FZ of 28 December 2024.

teaching of children, and often results in reputational downgrading, account closures and loss of access to financial services provided by private banks abroad.

Torture to extract confessions

41. Use of torture, in particular to extract confessions or to punish, remains widespread and systematic in the Russian Federation³⁰ and has been especially prevalent in national security investigations since 2022.³¹ Courts routinely accept evidence tainted by torture and fail to ensure effective investigation of credible torture allegations.

42. In October 2024, Svetlana Savelyeva was arbitrarily detained at the border in the Kursk region, when trying to cross into Ukraine to join her partner. She was subjected to a “carousel” of administrative detention and taken by Federal Security Service officers to hotel rooms and a private house where, over two months, she was tortured, including beatings, strangulation, electric shocks, humiliation, death threats and threats of sexual violence, to force a confession. In December 2024, she was charged with “treason” on accusations of attempting to join the Ukrainian armed forces.

43. In February 2025, brothers Matvey and Timofey Melnikov were sentenced to 20 and 19 years’ imprisonment, respectively, on charges of “attempted sabotage”, “treason” and participation in a “terrorist organization”, related to an alleged plan to film an arson attack at a military site. During pretrial detention, Timofey Melnikov was subjected to sexualized torture targeting his congenital genetic disorder, including repeated blows to the genitals with a hammer, burns with a torch and threats of castration, severe beatings and electric shocks. He was denied medical care and coerced into confessing under threats to his father’s life.

44. Videos broadcast on national television following the terrorist attack of March 2024 on Moscow’s Crocus City Hall in Moscow, claimed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, showed suspects being tortured, including one being subjected to electric shocks to the genitals and another having his earlobe cut off. Suspects appeared in court bearing visible signs of torture, which the judge ignored.³²

45. In August 2025, the Government of the Russian Federation moved to withdraw from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, after refusing to cooperate with its mechanism since 2022, further severing international oversight of the treatment of detainees and torture.

Entrapment

46. Since 2022, law enforcement has relied on provocations, whereby Federal Security Service agents pose as members of banned organizations and lead individuals into incriminating acts, most often anti-war statements. Many cases concern recruitment or expression of support for the Russian volunteer battalions fighting for Ukraine. In April 2024, Alexander Matkheev was sentenced to 10 years for “treason”, “justifying terrorism” and “involvement in a banned organization”, after an undercover agent posing as a recruiter for the Freedom of Russia Legion – a military unit of Russians fighting on the side of Ukraine – contacted him online and encouraged him to display its symbols, purchase camouflage and travel to Kazakhstan.

³⁰ [A/79/508](#).

³¹ See *ibid.* and [A/HRC/60/59](#).

³² See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-terrorist-attack-russian-concert-hall.

Reprisals against relatives of dissidents

47. Relatives of dissenters and opposition figures are increasingly prosecuted on fabricated charges. Alexei Navalny's brother, Oleg, was sentenced to prison in 2014 and 2022; the fathers of Ivan Zhdanov and Leonid Volkov, Navalny associates linked to the Anti-Corruption Foundation, faced extremism charges; in Bashkortostan, the brother of exiled dissident Ruslan Gabbasov is imprisoned on terrorism charges, while Gabbasov himself is wanted for extremism; and in Chechnya, severely ill Zarema Musaeva received an additional sentence of nearly four years as punishment for the opposition activities of her two sons.³³

Targeting of children

48. Targeting children on national security charges, with prosecutions based on anti-war statements and dissent, resulted in the listing of over 150 children on the federal "list of terrorists and extremists" as of July 2025, with some 80 per cent of them already convicted or suspects in ongoing terrorism cases.

49. Arseny Turbin, 15 years of age, was sentenced in June 2024 to five years' imprisonment on "terrorism" charges, on unfounded accusations of membership in the Freedom of Russia Legion under article 205.5. He has been tortured and threatened with rape while in the pretrial detention facility SIZO-5 in Moscow.

50. In November 2023, a 14-year-old girl was charged with "terrorism" and "attempted murder" for posting a firecracker video on a social media channel associated with the "Columbine movement" related to school shootings, which is banned in the Russian Federation as a terrorist organization. In pretrial detention, she was repeatedly gang-raped by her fellow girl inmates, with the complicity and acquiescence of the prison authorities, leading to her attempted suicide.

Risks for exiled activists

51. Exiled Russian activists accused of national security offences continue to face heightened risk, including forced return to the Russian Federation in violation of the non-refoulement principle.

52. In 2022, Alexei Rozhkov threw a Molotov cocktail at a military draft office and gave interviews about it, after which he fled to Kyrgyzstan, but in 2023, he was forcibly returned to the Russian Federation and tortured, including with electric shocks, to extract a confession, receiving 16 years' imprisonment on "terrorism" and "fake news" charges in May 2025.

53. In April 2025, Russian authorities issued arrest warrants and requested the extradition of Navalny's aides Dmitry Nizovtsev, Ruslan Shaveddinov and Nina Volokhonskaya, charging them with "extremism"-related and other politically motivated offences and calling them "traitors of the Motherland".

A. Fair trial guarantees violations

Retroactive application of the law

54. Retroactive application of the law by courts has become common practice, punishing individuals for acts that were not criminalized at the time of their commission. In 2024, the Russian Constitutional Court upheld criminalization for posting materials subsequently designated as extremist, endorsing ex post facto

³³ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/russia-un-experts-dismayed-violent-attack-against-journalist-yelena.

liability. The case concerned former Moscow municipal deputy Elena Selkova, fined for social media posts linked to Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation before it was labelled as "extremist" in 2021.

Access to and attacks on lawyers

55. Lawyers are increasingly subjected to criminal prosecution, travel restrictions and intimidation, particularly when involved in politically sensitive cases or those related to State secrets, anti-war activism or opposition figures. Defence lawyers in cases pertaining to national security must sign non-disclosure agreements under risk of criminal liability, and their access to defendants may be restricted and client-attorney confidentiality undermined.

56. In 2021, defence lawyer Ivan Pavlov was charged with "disclosing information" pertaining to the investigation in the politically motivated treason case against journalist Ivan Safronov, despite Pavlov not signing the non-disclosure agreement. Pavlov left the Russian Federation, while another lawyer in Safronov's case, Dmitry Talantov,³⁴ was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in November 2024, on charges of spreading "fake news" and "incitement of hatred" for comments on the Bucha massacre and in retaliation for defending Safronov

57. The non-disclosure agreements limit public scrutiny, as defence lawyers are effectively barred from engaging with the media, consulting experts, granting attorney requests or interviewing witnesses. As of May 2024, 200 lawyers working on State secrets had been prevented from leaving the Russian Federation³⁵ due to amendments to the federal law "on State secrets".³⁶

58. In May 2025, 64-year-old Kaliningrad-based lawyer, Maria Bontsler, was detained on charges of "confidential cooperation with a foreign State" in retaliation for human rights work. Ms. Bontsler defended clients in politically sensitive cases, including human rights activist Igor Baryshnikov. She has been denied access to her chosen legal counsel and has been assigned a State-appointed lawyer who refuses to communicate with her family or legal team.³⁷

59. Defence lawyers are increasingly prosecuted for their legitimate work as accomplices to their clients' alleged crimes. In January 2025, three of Alexei Navalny's lawyers, Vadim Kobzev, Alexei Liptser and Igor Sergunin, were sentenced to five and a half, five, and three and a half years, respectively, for relaying information to his family and supporters, actions consistent with legal representation. In February 2024, two other Navalny lawyers, Alexander Fedulov and Olga Mikhailova, were arrested in absentia and placed on a wanted list on the same charges.³⁸

60. In August 2024, the Supreme Court upheld Bakhrom Khamroyev's sentence of imprisonment of 13 years and nine months on "terrorism" charges in retaliation for defending individuals accused of affiliation with Hizb ut-Tahrir. Since his detention, he has been tortured and denied essential medical care, and his health has significantly deteriorated.

³⁴ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/11/russia-un-special-rapporteur-urges-acquittal-russian-lawyer-dmitry-talantov.

³⁵ Information from the human rights organization First Department.

³⁶ Federal law No. 432-FZ of 4 August 2023.

³⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/russia-must-release-ill-lawyer-maria-bontsler-detained-retaliation-human.

³⁸ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/russia-special-rapporteur-appalled-prison-sentences-punish-navalny-lawyers.

“Carousel” detentions

61. The tactic of forcing individuals through a cycle of consecutive administrative detentions is commonly applied as a precursor to fabricated national security charges.³⁹ In December 2023, 17-year-old Danil Efimov was detained at Volgograd airport for donations to a Ukrainian charitable fund. He was subjected to successive “carousel” administrative arrests, tortured and threatened with death to coerce a confession of treason. In July 2024, he was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment in a closed-door trial.

Use of military courts and closed trials

62. “Treason” and “terrorism”, as well as some “extremism”-related cases, are tried by military courts, even though the vast majority of the accused are civilians, including anti-war activists tried on “justification of terrorism” charges. Closed-door trials, both military and civilian, impede public scrutiny, in particular in politically motivated cases, and especially when defence teams are gagged with non-disclosure obligations.

Standards of proof

63. Standards of proof in national security, “extremism” and “terrorism” cases in the Russian Federation are compromised by mandatory reliance on expert evaluations, usually linguistic evaluations by State-appointed experts lacking independence or qualifications, as even recognized by the Ministry of Justice regarding an expert in the case against Vladimir Kara-Murza who also participated in multiple other cases. Nevertheless, such reports continue to form the basis for convictions. In the latest trial of former municipal deputy Alexei Gorinov,⁴⁰ in 2024, the first expert evaluation by independent university experts found no signs of the “justification of terrorism” in Gorinov’s statements, so the prosecution requested another analysis by Ministry of Justice experts to obtain the desired conclusions.

64. The use of secret witnesses in “extremism” and “terrorism” cases has also become common practice, noticeably in politically motivated convictions for affiliation with Hizb ut-Tahrir.⁴¹

V. Key targeted groups

65. The Special Rapporteur finds that the deliberate and systematic abuse of national security, extremism and terrorism legislation to silence dissent and dismantle independent civil society reflects a calculated strategy explicitly designed to persecute and marginalize specific groups within the Russian Federation.

Human rights defenders

66. In 2024, a criminal case was opened against Alexei Sokolov, head of the prison monitoring organization “Legal Basis”, for repeatedly displaying the Facebook

³⁹ A/HRC/54/54, para. 93.

⁴⁰ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/russia-special-rapporteur-reiterates-call-immediate-release-alexei-gorinov.

⁴¹ European Court of Human Rights, *Vasilyev and Others v. Russia*, Application No. 38891/08, Judgment, 22 September 2020.

logo.⁴² This followed a March 2022 court decision declaring Meta as “extremist” for refusing to impose war censorship.

67. In April 2025, an election monitoring activist from Tula, Ivan Surov, was sentenced to 12.5 years’ imprisonment on “treason” charges for an alleged donation to a fund supporting the Ukrainian military. The prosecution appears to be connected with his involvement in electoral monitoring and filing of a complaint of electoral fraud.

68. In June 2025, a military court in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk convicted 85-year-old human rights defender Mark Kuperman on “calls to terrorist activity” charges for a draft document discussing democratic reforms in the Russian Federation, which Kuperman had reportedly shared with colleagues in January 2023. Kuperman was fined 500,000 roubles (\$6,000).

69. In July 2025, a criminal case on “treason” charges was opened against Pavel Andreev, founder of the “Revolt Centre” in Syktyvkar and the 7x7 media outlet, leading to widespread searches at the premises of journalists and human rights defenders in 12 regions. He is accused of covert contacts with North Atlantic Treaty Organization representatives and foreign intelligence organizations, without specification of the nature of those activities.⁴³

70. In August 2025, exiled human rights defender Sergei Davidis was sentenced in absentia to six year’s imprisonment for “justification of terrorism”, for reposting the statement of Memorial recognizing 22 imprisoned members of the Azov battalion of Ukraine – designated as “terrorist” in the Russian Federation – as political prisoners.

Political opponents

Persecution of Alexei Navalny and his associates and supporters

71. Alexei Navalny faced numerous politically motivated criminal proceedings. His sentencing in August 2023 to 19 years’ imprisonment on “extremism” charges was upheld posthumously by the Supreme Court in July 2024. Rosfinmonitoring refused to remove Navalny from its “list of terrorists and extremists”.

72. In June 2025, Navalny’s memoir *Patriot* – tracing his life including imprisonment in the Arctic prison where he died in February 2024⁴⁴ – was declared “extremist” in a court ruling.

73. In June 2021, Navalny’s organizations – the Anti-Corruption Foundation, the Protection of Citizens’ Rights Foundation and his regional campaign offices – were banned as “extremist”. Between 2021 and 2025, Russian courts held at least 156 individuals liable for the use of “extremist symbols” associated with Navalny’s name and even his photo; of these, 104 were fined and 52 were subjected to administrative arrests. Mari El activist Sergei Mamaev has been charged under article 282.4 for “repeated demonstration of extremist symbols”, including wearing a “Free Navalny” inscription on his T-shirt.

74. At least 45 individuals have been charged under Criminal Code article 282.1 on “organization of or participation in an extremist community” for their affiliation with Navalny’s organizations, and at least 5 under article 282.2 (2) on “participation in an extremist organization”. At least 13 remain imprisoned, including lawyers and

⁴² See www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/01/russia-must-drop-charges-against-human-rights-defender-alexey.

⁴³ Information from the human rights organization OVD-Info.

⁴⁴ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/russia-un-experts-call-accountability-navalnys-death-and-immediate-release.

independent journalists, with sentences of up to 12 years. In June 2025, Navalny's aide, Leonid Volkov, was sentenced in absentia to 18 years' imprisonment in relation to multiple charges, including "extremism" and "justifying terrorism".

75. The number of criminal cases for financially supporting the Anti-Corruption Foundation rose. In the first seven months of 2025, 76 cases were opened, and at least 23 individuals were sentenced to imprisonment.

76. In one such case, police beat activist Alexei Maliarevsky to access his smartphone and obtain evidence of donations to the Anti-Corruption Foundation, for which he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in April 2024. In June 2025, the appellate court upheld the four-year prison sentence of Moscow surgeon Ivan Tishchenko for a donation to the Foundation.

"Vesna" movement

77. In December 2022, St. Petersburg City Court declared the peaceful youth-led movement "Vesna" an "extremist organization". In August 2025, six activists were on trial for "creating an extremist community". Additional charges under articles such as 354.1, on the "rehabilitation of Nazism", 207.3 on "fake news" about the army and 280.4 on "incitement against State security" have been brought against "Vesna" members for social media posts critical of official policies and war.

Omsk Civic Association

78. The Omsk Civic Association, founded in 2021, united Navalny's supporters and environmental and LGBT activists in Omsk region. Its work included documenting war casualties and assisting activists at risk. It was designated a "foreign agent" in July 2023 and declared an "extremist organization" in June 2024 on unsubstantiated grounds. Its leaders fled the Russian Federation fearing persecution, and their Russian identification cards were cancelled, effectively barring them from any legal activity in the country.

Other opposition figures

79. In April 2025, the Supreme Court upheld the three-year sentence of Alexei Gorinov, who was already serving a seven-year prison sentence for "fake news" about the army for publicly condemning the killing of children in Ukraine, on charges of "justifying terrorism" for an alleged conversation with fellow inmates about the war.⁴⁵

80. In February 2024, exiled politician Gennady Gudkov was included in the "list of terrorists and extremists", and his son Dmitry was charged in absentia with disseminating "fake news" about the army. Similarly, in 2024, Russian chess grandmaster and opposition figure Garry Kasparov was added to the "list of terrorists and extremists", while two organizations of which he was a co-founder, the Russian Anti-War Committee, and the Free Russia Forum, a biannual conference of Russian opposition, were designated "undesirable" in 2023.

81. In April 2023, opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment on "treason" charges, "fake news" about the army and affiliation with "undesirable organizations" for his statements critical of the Government and for opposing the war. He was released in a prisoner swap in August 2024.

⁴⁵ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/russia-special-rapporteur-reiterates-call-immediate-release-alexei-gorinov.

Journalists and media professionals

82. Since the start of the Russian war against Ukraine, journalists have increasingly faced prosecution under national security and extremism laws. Between July 2024 and July 2025, at least eight new criminal cases were opened, and 12 journalists were convicted on “extremism” charges. Some nine criminal cases were initiated, and seven journalists were convicted under article 205.2 on “calls for or justification, or propaganda of terrorism”.⁴⁶

83. In November 2024, journalist Nika Novak was sentenced to four years’ imprisonment under article 275.1 for “confidential cooperation” with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

84. In August 2024, Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who had been sentenced to 16 years’ imprisonment on unsubstantiated “espionage charges”, was released in a prisoner swap that included journalist Alsu Kurmasheva, imprisoned on “foreign agent” charges, and 14 other prisoners.⁴⁷

85. In April 2025, four journalists – Antonina Favorskaya, Artyom Krieger, Konstantin Gabov, and Sergey Karelin – were sentenced to five and a half years’ imprisonment on “extremism” charges for alleged participation in the Anti-Corruption Foundation, including filming court hearings and documenting Navalny’s funeral.

86. In July 2025, journalist and activist Olga Komleva was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment on “extremism” charges for involvement with Navalny’s campaign offices and “fake news” about the army. Also in July, journalist Farida Kurbangaleeva was sentenced in absentia for “justifying terrorism” and spreading “fake news” about the army, stemming from her war reporting.

87. In June 2025, Ukrainian journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko was released after more than four years in detention in Russian-occupied Crimea. He had been sentenced in 2021 on charges of “espionage” and “possession of explosives” and testified in court that he had been tortured to force a confession.

88. In September 2023, Dagestani journalist Abdulmumin Gadjiyev was sentenced to 17 years’ imprisonment on “terrorism” charges, allegedly in retaliation for his reporting.⁴⁸

Cultural figures and academics

89. Russian authorities have increasingly prosecuted scientists and artists under national security and extremism laws, often targeting those engaged in international academic cooperation or artistic expression criticizing the war.

90. In June 2023, the Moscow City Court sentenced physicist and professor Valery Golubkin to 12 years’ imprisonment on “treason” charges for passing “classified materials” to a North Atlantic Treaty Organization country while participating in a European Union-funded research project, although multiple expert commissions had confirmed that the materials were not State secrets.

91. Theatre director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petrychuk are serving lengthy prison sentences on fabricated “justification of terrorism” charges for

⁴⁶ Submission received from Russian NGO Mass Media Defence Centre.

⁴⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/08/russia-all-remaining-human-rights-defenders-journalists-and-anti.

⁴⁸ See <https://cpj.org/data/people/abdulmumin-gadzhiev>.

staging an award-winning play, *Finist, the Brave Falcon*. The actual reason for persecution stems from a series of poems that Berkovich wrote against the war.⁴⁹

92. In July 2025, writer Boris Akunin was sentenced in absentia to 14 years' imprisonment on "terrorism" charges and violating the Russian "foreign agent" law for his anti-war stance.

93. In June 2025, Perm-based photographer Grigory Skvortsov was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment on "treason" charges for sharing a book on Soviet bunkers and declassified documents with an American journalist.

94. In April 2025, a Moscow court issued an arrest warrant against exiled former Mediazona publisher and Pussy Riot member Petr Verzilov on new "treason" charges. In 2024, at least 20 activists' and artists' homes were raided by police in connection with this case, and Verzilov was added to the "list of terrorists and extremists". In 2023, he was sentenced in absentia on "war censorship" charges.

95. French researcher Laurent Vinatier, imprisoned in 2024 for failing to register as a "foreign agent", appeared in court in August 2025 on new "espionage" accusations.

Anti-war activists

96. Since 2022, most criminal cases related to anti-war statements have been initiated under article 205.2 on "justification of terrorism" as well as articles 207.3 on "fake news" about the army and 280.3 on "discrediting" the army.

97. In July 2024, Birobidzhan musician and anti-war activist Pavel Kushnir, accused of "justification of terrorism" for anti-war posts on a social media account with only five followers, died in custody following a hunger strike protesting the war.

98. In November 2024, Omsk resident Roman Tyurin was sentenced to six and a half years' imprisonment on politically motivated charges including "justification of terrorism" for social media posts against the war.

99. In May 2023, construction worker Daniil Stepanov was sentenced to four and a half years for anti-war graffiti, possession of Ukrainian flags and alleged correspondence with the Freedom of Russia Legion.

100. In January 2024, 72-year-old pensioner Evgenia Mayboroda was sentenced to five and a half years' imprisonment on "public calls to extremism" charges for reposting two videos on Mariupol casualties and a Ukrainian girl with anti-Russian rhetoric.

101. In September 2023, civil activist Richard Rouz was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for spreading "fake news" about the army and "justifying terrorism" for his social media posts, including on the Bucha massacre.

102. In June 2025, 57-year-old Russian citizen of Ukrainian ethnicity Gennady Artemenko was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment on "treason" and "terrorism" charges based on allegations of acting from "pro-Ukrainian ideological motives", when he tried to reach Ukraine to evacuate his elderly mother. His conviction was based on planted evidence and confessions obtained under torture.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons

103. Since the Supreme Court designated the "International LGBT Movement" as "extremist" in November 2023, authorities have launched a coordinated campaign of repression against LGBT individuals and organizations. This includes criminal

⁴⁹ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/russia-special-rapporteur-urges-acquittal-and-immediate-release-jailed.

prosecutions under extremism-related articles, raids on LGBT-friendly venues and the targeting of cultural institutions for distributing LGBT-themed literature. The designation has enabled the criminalization of private life, identity and expression, with charges ranging from “organizing extremist activity” to “public display of prohibited symbols”. At least 13 individuals were charged in 2024 alone, with further cases emerging in 2025.

104. In March 2024, law enforcement raided the LGBT-friendly club Pose in Orenburg. The club’s administrator Diana Kamilyanova, art director Alexander Klimov and owner Vyacheslav Khasanov were detained and accused on charges of “organizing an extremist community”. These arrests were part of a broader crackdown, with at least 10 individuals charged following similar raids in over 50 clubs, including in Chita, Voronezh and Kirov.

105. In May 2024, police searched the home of Artyom Fokin, president of the Samara-based LGBT organization Irida, and arrested him on charges of involvement in an “extremist community”. In July 2024, he was added to the “list of terrorists and extremists”.

106. In March 2025, in the Ulyanovsk region, Ilya Zhuravlyov, head of a medical centre, was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment on charges of participation in an “extremist organization” – in relation to the “International LGBT Movement” – and accusations of promoting same-sex relationships as an “initiation into a satanic cult”.

107. On 4 May 2025, coordinated raids were conducted at three publishing houses – Individuum, Popcorn Books and Eksmo. Several employees were detained for publishing literature with LGBT themes and charged with “organizing an extremist organization’s activities”.

Religious minorities

108. One of the most persecuted peaceful religious groups in the Russian Federation are the Jehovah’s Witnesses, banned as an “extremist organization” by the Russian Supreme Court in 2017. Since then, hundreds of individuals have been prosecuted on “extremism”-related charges. As of July 2025, 157 Jehovah’s Witnesses remained behind bars, including for holding worship, distributing religious literature and singing or speaking about their faith. Sentences range from fines to eight years’ imprisonment, with even elderly believers and individuals with serious health conditions detained.

109. Anna Safronova, sentenced to six years for “extremism” and held in penal colony No. 7 in Zelenokumsk, has faced torture, including prolonged placement in punishment cells (solitary confinement (SHIZO) and cell-type isolation (PKT)) and denial of adequate medical care since May 2024. In March 2025, Valery Baylo, serving two and a half years on an “extremism” sentence, died in pretrial detention facility SIZO-3 in Novorossiisk, after being denied access to medical treatment.

110. Hizb ut-Tahrir, banned in the Russian Federation as a “terrorist organization” in 2003 despite there being no verified violence by its members, remains a target for prosecution on “terrorism”-related charges under article 205.5, and individuals are often targeted under article 278 on the “violent overthrow of government” for mere affiliation with the group. Defendants are convicted for attending discussions or possessing literature, with sentences from 10 to 24 years in maximum-security prisons.

111. In 2024, at least two people were imprisoned and four others detained for alleged affiliation with the non-violent movement Nurdzhular, followers of Turkish theologian Said Nursi, banned as “extremist” in the Russian Federation in 2008. Also

in 2024, at least 12 people were convicted for alleged affiliation with Tablighi Jamaat, an international Islamic missionary movement banned in the Russian Federation as “extremist” since 2009.

National minorities and Indigenous Peoples

112. In June 2024, the Russian Supreme Court designated as “extremist” the non-existent “Anti-Russia Separatist Movement” and its 55 alleged affiliates, and in November 2024 banned as a “terrorist organization” the “Post-Russia Free Nations Forum”, along with its 172 alleged affiliates, which included Indigenous Peoples’ organizations.

113. In June 2025, Russian authorities included the co-founder of the “Free Yakutia Foundation”, Sargylana Kondakova, and Marina Khankhalaeva, the founder of “Tusgaar Buryad-Mongolia”, in the “list of terrorists and extremists”, both organizations having been listed earlier as “extremist”.

114. In 2023, the “Congress of the Oirat-Kalmyk People” was banned as an “extremist organization” in Kalmykia; similarly, in 2022, the “All-Tatar Centre” was banned in Tatarstan, and in 2020, the “Bashkort” movement in Bashkortostan. In 2016, Mejlis, the representative body of the Crimean Tatars, was banned in Russian-occupied Crimea.

115. Indigenous and national minority activists are also targeted with other national security charges. In 2023, Bashkir activist Ramila Galim (also known as Ramila Saitova) was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment under article 280.4 (2) on “incitement against State security” for a social media post calling upon mobilized Bashkir men not to fight in Ukraine and to return home instead.

Migrants

116. The number of crimes committed by foreigners, including migrants, in the Russian Federation is estimated at 2–4.5 per cent of the total number of crimes, including according to official statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. While the level of criminality among foreigners is lower than among Russian nationals, the head of the Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin, announced the creation of specialized units to investigate migrant-related crimes, referring to crimes perpetrated by migrants as a threat to State security and claiming that they increasingly committed terrorism and extremism offences. Bastrykin claimed that migrants committed 253 terrorism-related crimes in 2024, with no evidence provided.

117. In August 2025, a Moscow military court commenced a closed trial against 19 individuals, mostly migrants from Tajikistan, accused in connection with the 2024 Crocus City Hall terrorist attack. In the aftermath, Russian authorities launched a wave of purges and attacks on migrants, including police raids, detentions, torture and ill-treatment, and deportations, particularly of Tajiks and others from Central Asia.

118. The new counter-extremism strategy of December 2024 greatly expanded policy measures, aimed at harshening conditions for migrants’ residency and removal mechanisms and stripping naturalized Russians of nationality for “extremism” and “terrorism”, even when at risk of statelessness. In July 2025, Russian authorities expanded the grounds for stripping nationality beyond “terrorism”- and “extremism”-related convictions to include “confidential cooperation” and “assistance to international organizations”.

Detention and treatment of Ukrainians

119. Since the 2014 illegal occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, Russian authorities have initiated at least 1,109 politically motivated criminal cases against Ukrainians, and at least 924 individuals, including at least 110 Crimean Tatars,⁵⁰ remain arbitrarily detained, often in critical health condition and denied medical care.⁵¹

120. In 2024, at least 109 Ukrainians were convicted on politically motivated “terrorism” charges, and 303 new cases were opened. In addition, three Ukrainians were convicted on “extremism”-related charges, with at least 10 new cases opened.

Crimean Tatars

121. Crimean Tatars have been prosecuted under Russian terrorism and extremism legislation since 2014. The majority were convicted for alleged membership of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which, while banned as “terrorist” in the Russian Federation, remains legal in Ukraine. They are deported for trial and serve their sentences in the Russian Federation.

122. Emir-Usein Kuku, a Crimean Tatar human rights defender, was sentenced in November 2019 to 12 years’ imprisonment for organization of Hizb ut-Tahrir activity and “attempted forcible seizure of power”. Co-defendants in this case received between 7 and 19 years.

123. In February 2023, Crimean Tatar activist Jemil Gafarov, sentenced to 13 years’ imprisonment on Hizb ut-Tahrir-related charges, died in detention in Novocherkassk, Rostov region, after the denial of adequate life-saving medical treatment.

124. Mejit Abdurakhmanov, also sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment for alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir membership in 2022, has spent the last 11 months in SHIZO and PKT, in a prison colony in Chuvashia, and has been denied family visits. His health has deteriorated due to the detention conditions.

125. Access to independent legal representation remains a challenge, as lawyers from the occupied Crimea face persecution and intimidation. In 2023, Alexei Ladin’s home was raided by police, and he was detained on allegations of displaying “extremist symbols” linked to the Ukrainian coat of arms and a Crimean Tatar emblem. One year later, he was disbarred, becoming the fourth case of disbarment of Crimean lawyers for defending political prisoners and prisoners of war.

Prisoners of war

126. Russian authorities reported that 579 Ukrainian military personnel had been convicted as of April 2025, although details of their verdicts remain unpublished. Trials are mostly conducted in the Rostov region and occupied territories, but also in other parts of the Russian Federation – from Moscow to Sakhalin.

127. Russian authorities do not formally acknowledge prisoner-of-war status for detained Ukrainian military personnel, prosecuting many of them as civilians on charges relating to “terrorism”, thus denying them the protections of the Geneva Conventions. Ukrainian prisoners of war are often prosecuted under terrorism-related provisions for membership in Ukrainian military regiments declared as “terrorist” by the Russian Federation, such as Azov, Aidar, the Crimean Tatar battalion named after Noman Çelebicihan and the Donbass battalions.

⁵⁰ Submission from the Centre for Civil Liberties.

⁵¹ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/no-justice-alexei-navalny-and-more-lives-risk-russia-warns-un-special.

128. Legally, designation as a “terrorist organization” of an international organization requires a ruling by the Supreme Court, and in 2022, the Azov and Crimean Tatar battalions were thus designated. However, since February 2022, authorities have increasingly applied a legal bypass by using article 205.4 on “terrorist community”, which courts may invoke without a Supreme Court ruling if a member of a group is convicted under this article. This has been used against members of the Aidar and Donbass battalions.⁵²

129. In September 2023, the Southern Military District Court convicted Lyubov Selina to five years’ imprisonment and ruled that Aidar was a “terrorist community”. The Federal Security Service has included Aidar in the “unified federal list of terrorist organizations”. Similar actions have targeted members of the Donbass battalions.

130. In 2025, Ukrainian prisoners of war captured in the Kursk region were charged under articles 205 and 332 on “terrorism” and “illegal border crossing”, respectively, with 305 sentences imposed for those charges by late August 2025.

Civilian detainees

131. Ukrainian civilians held in Russian detention are also routinely tried on national security-related charges and receive lengthy prison sentences, although their confessions are extracted through torture,⁵³ such as Irina Danilovich’s torture to force a “treason” confession.⁵⁴

132. In December 2024, after six years of enforced disappearance, the military court in Rostov-on-Don convicted three Ukrainian civilians, Sergey Gruzinov, Viktor Shydlovsky and Natalia Vlasova, on charges of “terrorism”, espionage and “attempted assassination”, sentencing them to up to 22 years’ imprisonment. Vlasova, in a rare public court testimony, described being stripped, tied, subjected to electric shocks, raped with a bottle and gang-raped by 15 armed men, followed by her teeth being filed down with a metal file. Despite the gravity and consistency of these testimonies, the court failed to investigate the allegations of torture.

133. Similarly, in April 2025, the “Melitopol Five” – Ukrainian civilians Oleksandr Zhukov, Ihor Horlov, Volodymyr Zuev, Andrii Golubev and Yurii Petrov – were sentenced for “terrorism” to up to 14 years, with confessions extracted through torture.

134. In October 2024, Irina Navalnaya, a resident of Russian-occupied Mariupol (no relation to Alexei Navalny), was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment by a military court in Rostov-on-Don, on accusations of an “attempted terrorist act” and “illegal explosives possession”. Her surname, a student internship at a Mariupol police station and her stepfather’s service in the Azov battalion contributed to her being targeted for persecution. She retracted her confession in court, testifying that she had been tortured with electric shocks and severely beaten in custody. Under torture, she was forced to record a video confession, aired on the Russian State NTV channel, with the title “I Am Zelensky’s Scum”.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

135. The abuse of national security and public safety legislation has become yet another repression tool against dissent, spiralling since the Russian full-scale

⁵² Submission received from Russian human rights organization Memorial.

⁵³ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/russias-repression-home-and-aggression-against-ukraine-demand-justice-no.

⁵⁴ See communication AL RUS 6/2023, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28081>.

invasion of Ukraine. Since 2022, prosecutions have escalated dramatically, targeting a wide range of individuals, including journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, activists, cultural figures and ordinary citizens, for the peaceful exercise of their freedoms of expression, association and assembly, as well as for lawful conduct as part of their professional duties.

136. These practices are compounded by legislative changes expanding the scope, severity and vagueness of national security offences, diverging from the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality under international law. Thus, Criminal Code article 276 has evolved from a narrowly applied provision on espionage into a broad instrument of political control, with expanded definitions and lowered evidentiary standards, making it a central tool in the campaign against dissent, particularly in the context of the war on Ukraine.

137. Legal provisions on “extremism” have no basis in international law and violate human rights when they trigger criminal liability. After February 2022, the aggressive application of article 280 on “extremism” led to the mass prosecution of peaceful anti-war dissent, especially online statements. Similarly, the Russian framework on counter-terrorism is overly broad and vague and is abused to criminalize legitimate speech and lawful, peaceful actions that express dissent or opposition to the war under charges of “justification of terrorism”.

138. The enforcement of these vague and broad legal provisions is accompanied by disproportionately severe penalties, with a clear aim of instilling fear and deterring others from exercising rights and freedoms, clearly proscribed under articles 19, 21, and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

139. The growing prosecution of children under terrorism and treason provisions for acts such as distributing leaflets, expressing dissent, or minor vandalism is alarming, reflecting a broader pattern of a punitive approach to instil fear and suppress dissent.

140. While the use of torture, in particular to extract confessions or to punish dissent, was common prior to 2022, it has severely intensified since then and become widespread and systematic and is particularly prevalent in investigations pertaining to national security, including against Ukrainian detainees.

141. There is growing use of entrapment by law enforcement and security services. Individuals are approached, often online or through covert channels, and, recalling that the mere expression of disagreement suffices for “extremist” charges, induced into actions later used as the basis for fabricating prosecution.

142. Since the Supreme Court’s 2023 designation of the “International LGBT Movement” as “extremist”, there has been a coordinated campaign of repression against LGBT individuals and organizations, including criminal prosecutions under extremism-related articles, raids on LGBT-friendly venues, and targeting of cultural institutions for distributing LGBT-themed literature. Similarly, Indigenous and minority rights groups are targeted as “extremist” or “terrorist”, suppressing their voices and conflating peaceful advocacy with a national security threat. Migrants, particularly from Central Asia, face disproportionate targeting under national security laws, including torture, arbitrary detention and collective punishment. Simultaneously, lawyers are increasingly subjected to criminal prosecution, travel restrictions and intimidation, particularly when involved in cases related to State secrets, anti-war activism or opposition figures.

143. Cumulatively, these trends indicate the systematic abuse of national security and public safety frameworks to criminalize peaceful dissent, erode civic space and suppress the legitimate exercise of civil and political rights. The

convergence of repressive and purposefully vague legislation, abusive enforcement practices and harsh punishments, coupled with official narratives of identifying and denouncing “traitors to the Motherland”, points to a calculated strategy to silence any opposition and consolidate absolute control.

144. Consequently, the Special Rapporteur recommends that Russian authorities:

(a) Engage in good faith with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, including by granting unhindered access to the country and enabling full engagement with all stakeholders, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions and the State’s obligations under international law, and take urgent steps to implement the recommendations contained in her previous reports;⁵⁵

(b) Urgently revise national security legislation to align it with international law, including by narrowing the scope of offences related to treason, espionage and confidential cooperation and eliminating vague and imprecise language. Ensure its application exclusively to conduct presenting a genuine and demonstrable threat to national security and never as a tool to stifle peaceful expression or civic activity and especially anti-war expression. Immediately review the cases of those sentenced under these provisions and release unconditionally those unjustly imprisoned, providing full reparations and expunging their criminal records;

(c) Cease the targeted use of counter-terrorism legislation against the peaceful exercise of the freedoms of expression, assembly and association, and especially anti-war protest, and ensure that it is applied, in accordance with international standards, only against criminal acts committed with intent to cause death or serious injury, or the taking of hostages, for the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government to take a certain action or not;

(d) Revoke legislation related to “extremist activity” used in politically motivated cases and applied in a manner that infringes upon the rights to freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Immediately review the cases of those sentenced under these provisions and release unconditionally those unjustly imprisoned, providing full reparations and expunging their criminal records. Substantially revise existing public safety legislation, ensuring that all provisions are precisely defined and limited to conduct involving incitement to violence or discrimination;

(e) Immediately repeal the July 2025 laws making the use of virtual private networks an aggravating circumstance in criminal proceedings and introducing administrative fines for advertising virtual private network services and for conducting online searches for “extremist materials”, introduced to target dissent. End the use of surveillance-based punishment and dismantle measures that criminalize online information-seeking to restore digital freedoms and protect privacy;

(f) Immediately halt the prosecution and listing as “terrorists” and “extremists” of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees for actions related to the ongoing war against Ukraine and their support, actual or perceived. Immediately and unconditionally release all Ukrainian civilians detained, including those sentenced under national security and public safety legislation, ensuring their safe return and full reparations;

⁵⁵ [A/HRC/54/54](#), [A/HRC/57/59](#), [A/HRC/60/59](#) and [A/79/508](#).

(g) Immediately halt the practice of provocation and entrapment by security services in national security-related investigations, including manufacturing evidence and/or manipulating individuals into criminal conduct;

(h) Criminalize torture as a distinct crime in domestic legislation in accordance with article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ensuring that the applicable penalties are commensurate with the gravity of the crime. Introduce the criminal offence of “other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment”, fully reflecting articles 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture. Ensure the inadmissibility in any legal proceedings of any evidence obtained through torture, including rape and sexual violence, and ensure independent and prompt investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators and justice for victims;

(i) Immediately cease the arrest and prosecution of children under “treason”, “terrorism”- and “extremism”-related charges for the peaceful exercise of human rights, or minor offences. Promote the use of diversion, non-judicial measures and non-custodial sentences. Ensure that proceedings involving children fully comply with child justice standards in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(j) Effectively safeguard the independence of defence lawyers, including by ending unjustified restrictions on their movement and their ability to perform their duties effectively, including in national security and public safety cases. Ensure that lawyers are not threatened with or subjected to intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest or criminal prosecution for their professional duties. Reinstate full access to legal counsel of one’s choice, including in cases involving State secrets and/or national security. Strengthen safeguards against surveillance and ensure confidential communication between lawyers and clients;

(k) Ensure effective implementation of fair trial rights in all national security and public safety cases, especially through effective guarantees for the presumption of innocence and equality of arms, ensuring, inter alia, defence access to all case materials and witness statements and the ability of the defence to call its own witnesses and experts and ceasing the practice of stifling defence lawyers through non-disclosure obligations. Ensure that, as a rule, trials are only exceptionally conducted behind closed doors;

(l) Immediately cease the abuse of national security, public safety and particularly anti-extremism and counter-terrorism laws against civil society groups and human rights defenders, media and cultural figures, political opponents, LGBT persons, Indigenous Peoples, national and religious minorities and anti-war activists. Guarantee that any designations as “terrorist” and/or “extremist” are only made through a transparent judicial process with an effective right to legal defence and appeal, and review all designations made thus far, ensuring that those lacking due process are independently reviewed and that unjustly listed individuals and groups are delisted and fully compensated;

(m) Repeal the 2023 decision of the Supreme Court designating the “International LGBT Movement” as an “extremist” organization and annul all administrative and criminal convictions issued consequently. End the persecution and arrest of LGBT persons on “extremism” charges and initiate thorough, independent investigations into all violations of LGBT persons’ rights, including death in custody and torture, ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims;

(n) **Rescind the 2024 decision of the Supreme Court designating the non-existent “separatist movement” as an “extremist” organization. End the targeting of Indigenous Peoples’ and national minorities’ organizations and advocates with “extremist” and “terrorist” designations;**

(o) **Immediately stop the targeting of migrants, particularly from Central Asia, under national security laws and take effective measures to prevent and combat any hate speech and violence against migrants. Prevent and combat discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes, including against migrants and refugees, by ensuring the accountability of those responsible.**
