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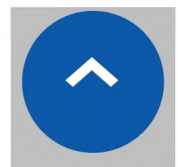
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Russia's repression policy to dismantle civil society exposes fear of accountability: UN Special Rapporteur

11 December 2025

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GENEVA – Intensifying attacks on human rights defenders and anti-war voices in Russia point to a dramatic decline in the country's human rights situation and the growing insecurity of a state that fears accountability, a UN expert warned today.

“Russian authorities have accelerated their assault on civic freedoms with the dismantling of what remains of independent civil society in the country over recent weeks, resulting in a seismic decline of the human rights situation,” said Mariana Katzarova, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation.

“The latest wave of designations of organisations as ‘undesirable’ is one of the most striking examples, along with the instrumentalisation of national security and public safety legislation to target lawyers, journalists, and human rights defenders,” she said.

Last week, long-standing civil society organisations were declared “undesirable”, and were added to a rapidly expanding list of banned entities that includes Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). Russian law criminalises engagement with these entities, exposing individuals to up to six years of imprisonment.

To date, over 280 organisations have been labelled as “undesirable”, while more than 1,100 entities and individuals have been designated as “foreign agents.”

“These colossal numbers reflect a deliberate and calculated strategy to isolate the Russian population from independent information, legal assistance, and peaceful activism,” the Special Rapporteur said.

These latest designations have taken place in the context of ever shrinking civic space, where any independent voice has been targeted. In October, prominent human rights lawyers Olga Sadovskaya, head of Crew Against Torture, and Elena Shakhova, head of Citizens Watch, were subjected to a public smear campaign in the pro-government media, reflecting a broader campaign to discredit leading human rights

defenders. On 28 October, Shakhova was charged with “discrediting the Russian army” for Citizens Watch monitoring of anti-war activists’ trials.

On 27 November, the Military Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of one of Memorial’s leaders, Sergey Davidis, sentenced under “justification of terrorism” charges for reposting Memorial’s publication declaring members of Ukrainian Azov battalion – designated in Russia as a “terrorist organisation” – as political prisoners. On the same day, the Russian Supreme Court designated late opposition leader Alexey Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation as a “terrorist organisation”.

“Such blatant abuse of counter-terrorism legislation to criminalise peaceful expression and the anti-war stance is profoundly alarming,” the expert said. “Designating human rights defenders as “extremists” or “terrorists” has a devastating effect on civic space.”

Katzarova urged the Government to immediately implement the recommendations in her reports in **September** and **October** 2025.

“Repression cannot erase the work of human rights defenders – they cannot be silenced,” the Special Rapporteur said. “Repression only exposes the profound insecurity of a Government that fears scrutiny and accountability.”

Mariana Katzarova is the **Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation**.

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- **Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders**
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