

22 June 2016

Mr Sergey Lavrov
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
Russian Federation
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119200 Moscow
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Threat by a Russian diplomat against Florian Irminger, Head of Advocacy of the Human Rights House Foundation, at the United Nations Human Rights Council

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations from various countries, members of the Human Rights House Network, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, and other NGOs, would like to express our strongest concern over increasing intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders working with international organizations.

In particular, we are outraged and extremely worried by a recent incident, when our colleague Florian Irminger, Head of Advocacy at the Human Rights House Foundation, the Secretariat of the Human Rights House Network, received a death threat during the 31st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. On Thursday 24 March 2016, during the adoption of the Council's resolution on human rights defenders, a twitter account sent a tweet directly to F. Irminger. The tweet contained a disturbing graphic and was accompanied by a written threat on his life.

The account of the individual making this threat, which is now closed, included a succession of tweets and a photo that show the individual was closely monitoring the debate and vote in the Council on the Russia-led amendments to the human rights defenders resolution. Evidence strongly suggests that the account belongs to a diplomat working at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office in Geneva and attending the Human Rights Council. The Russian Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva recognized that the threat originated from one of the accredited diplomats of the Russian Federation to the United Nations and that the employee had been reprimanded.¹ Still, at the opening of the 32nd session of the Council, the Russian diplomat was attending, continuing his work on human rights.

We see this unprecedented threat in the context of a particularly repressive environment in Russia for human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers, which includes restrictive legislation, legal persecution, smear campaigns, and physical attacks. Moreover, Russia voted

¹ The President of the Human Rights Council, in his introductory statement at the opening of the 32nd session, underlined this fact. "NGOs urge action following threats at the Council," <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21686.html>.

against the resolutions on human rights defenders in the UN General Assembly in autumn 2015² and in the UN Human Rights Council in March 2016.³ The tweet with a death threat, coming from an official representative of a State, which systematically suppresses civil society, should be taken with outmost seriousness. Instead, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation was quoted as considering this incident “basically a joke”.⁴

According to Article 2.1 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,⁵ States have the responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, by adopting such steps as may be necessary to create all conditions necessary in the social, economic, political and other fields, as well as the legal guarantees required to ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction, individually and in association with others, are able to enjoy all those rights and freedoms in practice. Like any other state, the Russian Federation has the responsibility to protect and promote human rights, particularly to create a safe environment for the work of civil society in the country and abroad.

Given the serious nature of this threat, we call upon you to immediately suspend the concerned diplomat from working at the UN Human Rights Council and take appropriate disciplinary measures. We are outraged by the fact that the concerned diplomat was present at the opening of the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council and is allowed to continue his work normally at the United Nations. We further call upon you to undertake necessary measures to prevent a similar situation in the future and to report to the Human Rights Council publicly during the dedicated agenda items on such steps.

Yours sincerely,

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

Supported by NGOs members of the Human Rights House Network:

Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House in exile, Vilnius (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Belarusian PEN Centre
- Belarusian Association of Journalists
- Belarusian Helsinki Committee
- City Public Association “Centar Supolnasc”
- Human Rights Centre “Viasna”
- Law Initiative

² “UN adopts resolution supporting human rights defenders,” <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21308.html>.

³ “UN clearly stands behind right to protest and to promote human rights,” <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21548.html>.

⁴ “Russian Diplomat Is Accused of Threatening Rights Activist on Twitter,” *The New York Times*, 14 June 2016, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/15/world/russian-diplomat-accused-of-threatening-rights-advocate-twitter-game-thrones.html>.

⁵ Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, General Assembly resolution, 8 March 1999 (UN Doc.: A/RES/53/144).

Human Rights House Belgrade (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights YUCOM

Human Rights House Bergen (on behalf of the following NGO):

- Rafto Foundation

Education Human Rights House Chernihiv (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Chernihiv Public Committee of Human Rights Protection
- Civic Education Center “Almenda”
- M’ART
- Ukrainian Helsinki HR Union

Human Rights House Oslo (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Health and Human Rights Info
- Human Rights House Foundation

Human Rights House Tbilisi (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Article 42 of the Constitution
- Caucasian Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Studies (CAUCASIA)
- Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
- Human Rights Centre
- Media Centre
- Union Sapari – Family without Violence

Human Rights House Yerevan (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Democracy Today
- Helsinki Association for Human Rights
- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor
- Insuring Equal Rights
- Journalists' Club “Asparez”
- Public Information and Need of Knowledge (PINK Armenia)
- Real World, Real People
- Socioscope Societal Research & Consultancy Center
- The Rule of Law Human Rights
- Women's Resource Center

Human Rights House Zagreb (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- APEO/UPIM Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
- B.a.B.e.
- CMS - Centre for Peace Studies
- Documenta - Centre for Dealing with the Past
- GOLJP - Civic Committee for Human Rights
- Svitanje - Association for Protection and Promotion of Mental Health

Other HRHN members and partner organisations:

- Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement
- Center for Civil Liberties
- Human Rights Information Center
- Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
- Index on Censorship, United Kingdom
- Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group
- Legal Education Society (LES)
- Women's Association for Rational Development (WARD)

NGOs members of the Civic Solidarity Platform:

- Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations
- Bir Duino – Kyrgyzstan Human Rights Movement
- Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
- Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights
- Crude Accountability
- Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
- Helsinki Committee of Armenia
- Human Rights Monitoring Institute
- International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
- Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
- Kharkiv Regional Foundation "Public Alternative"
- The Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT)
- Legal Transformation Center (Belarus)
- The Netherlands Helsinki Committee
- Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- Nota Bene
- People in Need
- Promo-LEX Moldova
- Public Association "Dignity" (Astana, Kazakhstan)
- Public Foundation Golos Svobody
- Public Verdict Foundation
- Regional Center for Strategic Studies (Georgia/Azerbaijan)
- The Swiss Helsinki Committee
- UNITED for Intercultural Action

Other NGOs:

- Acción Solidaria on HIV/Aids, Venezuela
- Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR Centre), Geneva
- CIVILIS Human Rights, Venezuela
- CODEVIDA, Coalition of organizations for the rights to health and to life, Venezuela