

**24th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva (Switzerland)
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**Item 6. Consideration of UPR reports – Russia
Statement on behalf of Freedom House (delivered by Konstantin Baranov)**

Check against delivery

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Concerns about the recently imposed harsh legislative restrictions on the exercise of fundamental rights in the Russian Federation, including the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, have been raised by many delegations during the current UPR cycle, and numerous recommendations have been proposed to repeal or amend these legal provisions. Unfortunately, Russia has declined the majority of the most specific and meaningful recommendations in favor of vague though ultimately empty statements and commitments.

The laws in question include the so-called “foreign agents” NGO law, restrictions on public events and assemblies, the re-criminalisation of libel and the laws banning the so-called “homosexual propaganda.”

The effect of these laws is clear: they in essence outlaw nearly any type of independent activity in defense of human rights and public interest by making it punishable with either administrative or criminal sanctions. They also discredit the work of human rights defenders and civil society groups by labeling them as agents of foreign influence and enemies of the traditional foundations of society. Such an environment seriously threatens the very existence of such groups and their ability to continue their peaceful and legitimate activities for the defense and promotion of universally recognized human rights.

These legislative provisions have already been criticized by a number of authoritative international human rights institutions, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council special procedures, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Venice Commission, as being not in compliance with international human rights standards to which Russia has committed. Thus, the position of the Russian authorities that these laws are fully in line with the country’s international obligations cannot be accepted.

Restrictions on rights in Russia also affect neighboring countries. In the past year, similar initiatives to restrict fundamental rights (primarily the “foreign agents” and the “homosexual propaganda” laws) have been considered by other states. This fact should only increase international alarm about developments in Russia.

Given the above, we express our hope that the Council’s member states will continue and intensify their efforts to promote the relevant UPR recommendations which were declined by Russia using other existing bilateral and multilateral instruments.

We also recommend that the Russian Federation:

1. Remove the recently adopted legislative provisions which restrict the exercise of the rights to freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression in line with the recommendations made by the international human rights bodies;
2. Fully cooperate with the Council’s thematic mandates on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of opinion and expression and the situation of human rights defenders, including authorization and realization of their requests for country visits in the nearest future;
3. Extend a standing invitation to all of the Council’s special procedures to demonstrate Russia’s commitment to observing the entire range of its human rights obligations.

Thank you for your attention.