



Human Rights Now Strongly Condemns Russia's "Extremist" Designation of the Organization Memorial

Human Rights Now strongly condemns the Russian authorities' decision to arbitrarily designate the human rights organization Memorial as "extremist" and ban its activities, while simultaneously seeking to obstruct its vital work beyond Russia's borders. This measure does not stand alone: it represents another step in the systematic repression carried out by Russian authorities since the outbreak of the armed conflict against Ukraine, where over 343 organizations have been labelled as 'undesirable' and 20,813 individuals have been placed on the 'list of terrorists and extremists,'¹ directly undermining efforts toward accountability, truth, and historical memory.

A Fabricated Legal Basis

On 9 April 2026, the Russian Supreme Court requested the Ministry of Justice to designate the "International Public Movement Memorial" as an "extremist" organization, as part of an intensifying campaign to suppress human rights work.² To justify this decision, Russian authorities fabricated the notion of a non-existent "movement" as a sweeping legal pretext to encompass entities beyond the two legally recognized organizations that formerly composed Memorial within Russia—the Memorial Human Rights Center and Memorial International. This is not the first time the Russian government has abused the powers granted by anti-extremism legislation to silence civil society. The same framework was deployed by the St. Petersburg City Court in April 2026 after the creation of a non-existent "international LGBT movement" that led to the designation of the Russian LGBT Network as an "extremist organization" and to the imposition a nationwide ban on its activities across the country.³ Back in June 2024, the Supreme Court had already resorted to creating non-existent movements, including the 'Anti-Russia Separatist Movement', encompassing 55 Indigenous and minority organizations, to designate them as "extremist."⁴ Collectively, this strategy pushes activism to the shadows and dismantles civil society.

Silencing a Nobel-Laureate Institution

Memorial is one of the oldest human rights organizations in Russia, founded on the mission to defend the right to criticize power and protect the fundamental rights of all citizens. Thanks to its outstanding efforts in documenting war crimes, human rights abuses, and the abuse of power, it obtained the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2022.⁴

Since its founding, Memorial has monitored violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in zones of armed conflict. As the first Russian human rights organization to conduct an official monitoring mission in Ukraine, its fact-finding work was pivotal in exposing the scale and gravity of atrocities committed since Russia's aggression began.⁵

The "extremist" designation is the culmination of a prolonged campaign to silence Memorial, following dissolution orders against the two domestic Memorial entities (Memorial Human Rights Center and Memorial International) which was issued between late 2021 and April 2022. In the wake of the court ruling, the Memorial Human Rights

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/strategy-blattant-abuse-counter-terrorism-and-extremism-laws-destroy-russian>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/04/10/russia-memorial-rights-group-declared-extremist>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/04/russia-russian-lgbt-network-is-labelled-extremist-in-escalating-crackdown-on-lgbti-rights/>

⁴ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/memorial/facts/>

⁵ <https://memorialcenter.org/ru/news/pervaya-missiya-rossijskih-pravozashhitnikov-v-ukraine-zapis-konferenczii>



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Protection Center announced the termination of its operations in Russia.⁶ Of grave concern, the entire legal process was concluded in a single hearing, held behind closed doors, with the case file classified as "top secret"—effectively barring Memorial's attorneys from meaningfully participating in the proceedings.⁶ The procedural irregularities and the complete absence of any legitimate legal basis only further expose the repressive and arbitrary intent driving this measure.

Chilling Effects Beyond Russia's Borders

The reach of this repression extends well beyond Russian territory. In February 2026, the Ministry of Justice added the Switzerland-based Memorial International Association and the German foundation Zukunft Memorial to Russia's list of "undesirable organizations," amounting to a deliberate attempt to extinguish Memorial's international presence and silence its global advocacy.⁷ Such cross-border chilling effects have been further amplified by the designation of the International Public Movement Memorial as "extremist".

Effects of the decision

The banning is part of an immense campaign for the criminalization of human rights workers and defenders through intrusive searches and arbitrary arrest.⁷ The decision legitimizes an expansion of repressions and creates the prerequisites for persecuting any activity or person supporting the type of work that Memorial was doing, regardless of the country of registration and even the real connection between the projects.

The "extremist" designation carries severe consequences: participating in or financing Memorial organizations is now punishable by up to 12 years in prison. As a result, even liking or sharing Memorial's social media content, or referencing the organization in publications without labeling it "extremist", may constitute a prosecutable criminal offense. Anyone with any connection to the designated "movement" now faces the risk of detention or criminal prosecution. This is a deliberate strategy to spread fear and criminalize all opposition to official narratives.

Call for action

Human Rights Now calls on the international community to unequivocally condemn these measures. The current situation amounts to a direct assault on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly—two foundational pillars of any democratic society. As a signatory to international human rights treaties, Russia bears binding legal obligations to uphold these rights for all persons within its jurisdiction, including Memorial's members and supporters.

Human Rights Now stands in full solidarity with Memorial and all those targeted by this repression. We call on Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally reverse the "extremist" designation, restore Memorial's ability to operate freely, and cease all forms of harassment and persecution of human rights defenders.

⁶ <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2026/04/09/v-rossii-zapretili-memorial-priznav-ego-ekstremistskim>

⁷ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/russia-prominent-human-rights-defenders-targeted-under-undesirable-organizations-legislation/>