

Dear Mr President,
Yuriy S. Pilipenko,
President of the Russian Federal Bar Association,
43 Sivtsev Vrazhek lane,
Moscow, 119002,
Russia

I am writing to express my dismay at the recent disbarment of lawyers Lilya Gemedzhi, Rustem Kyamilev and Nazim Sheikhmambetov, solely for carrying out their professional duties in defence of human rights in Crimea, and to urge you and the professional lawyers' community to step up your solidarity and defence efforts and take steps to immediately reinstate their status of 'advokat' (lawyer).

The three lawyers were members of the Bar Association "Nizam" (Chechen Republic), which on 15 July disbarred them in response to a complaint made against them by the Ministry of Justice Directorate in Chechnya. As a member of the professional legal community, you will, no doubt, share my concern over the fact that their disbarment was prompted by a complaint from a state body; this infringes the fundamental principle of independence of the legal profession. According to the lawyers, they had no prior notice about the complaint and disciplinary hearing against them. While the Ministry of Justice Directorate alleged professional infringements by them, there is little doubt that this is retaliation for their human rights work in Crimea, where they represented clients in politically motivated cases. The lawyers plan to appeal the decision, both via the courts and the Federal Bar Association. Unless the decision is immediately reversed, they will not be able to represent clients in criminal proceedings and in court, nor take new qualification exams for a year.

As you will probably be aware, members of the legal community in Crimea have faced growing reprisals in recent years and months, thus, the disbarment of the three lawyers sends yet another chilling warning. Representatives of the legal community have been subjected to searches and arbitrary arrests by members of law enforcement agencies, and some have received excessive fines or so-called administrative detention for "offences" that consisted in exercising their human rights to freedom of expression and/or peaceful assembly.

By means of my letter to you, I am addressing members of the legal profession in your country, and specifically the Russian Federal Bar Association, with a call to show solidarity of the professional community and take steps to protect its members who are carrying out their professional duties in line with international standards on the role of lawyers. I specifically urge the Russian Federal Bar Association to exercise its authority and discretion under Article 37.2 of the Federal Law "On Legal Work and Legal Profession" (63-FZ of 31 May 2002) to reverse the decision to disbar and to

reinstate the 'advokat' status of Lilya Gemedzhi, Rustem Kyamilev and Nazim Sheikhmambetov.

Yours sincerely,