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## **Statement by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses deep concern over further deterioration of the legitimate work of human rights groups in Russia.

Early on Saturday, June 22, 2013, the office of the high-profile human rights organization, All-Russia movement For Human Rights, was forcibly evicted from their office located at Maly Kislovskiy Lane 7 in Moscow. In forcing the organization staff out of the office, unidentified people who didn't present their documents, used disproportionate force reportedly injuring seven people, including the chair of the organization Lev Ponomaryov (aged 72) and Sergey Mitrokhin, a candidate to the position of the mayor of Moscow. The attackers in plain clothes were also assisted by the riot police, according to Lev Ponomaryov. He was being dragged out of the office down the stairs by policemen who didn't stop two people in plain clothes from kicking a human rights defender.

The confrontation in the office of the human rights organization started at around 3 pm on June 21 when a group of people in plain clothes entered the office claiming that the organization had been occupying it illegally after the rent agreement between them and the municipality had been discontinued in February 2013. At that, the mediation between the leadership of the human rights organization and the city authorities went on and according to the Moscow city ombudsman, Alexander Muzykantskiy, he had a separate meeting with Sergey Sobyanin, the mayor of Moscow, in the end of March during which he received assurances that the human rights organization could continue their work from the office. The For Human Rights movement has paid the rent until the end of June. Although the organization has had difficulties with extending the lease, the issue has never been a matter of the court consideration.

The group of unidentified people in plain clothes who burst into the office on June 21 immediately started to change the locks blocking several staff people of the organization in their rooms. They were accompanied by the NTV crew. They were also joined by representatives of the Young Guard pro-Kremlin movement.

Documents, computers as well as personal belongings of the staff members of the human rights organization were reportedly stolen. Already in the evening of June 21, the leadership of the Young Guard movement released information denouncing human rights defenders as "foreign agents". They used the stolen documents and various draft letters as evidence to that.

Lev Ponomaryov, Sergey Mitrokhin and a number of activists who came to support the human rights defenders remained in the locked office rooms until early morning of June 22 when the riot police smashed the doors open and threw the people out of the office building. Neither Vladimir Lukin or lawyers, including Karinna Moskalenko and Violetta Volkova, who came to assist the blocked human rights defenders, were not let into the office.

On June 23 confrontation continued as activists were holding pickets in support of the human rights organization. Three activists were detained for "holding an unsanctioned protest".

On July 1, 2013 the attacks on For Human Rights movement continued when the NTV channel aired the propaganda film featuring Lev Ponomaryov as a traitor of Russia and foreign agent.

The Interior Ministry department for Moscow denies that police used force in evicting the staff of the non-governmental organization For Human Rights from its office.

"Police officers were deployed near the office to ensure public order after the Moscow city administration issued written notification on this measure. Police did not take any forcible measures, and the eviction was carried out by a private security company," it said, which contradicts testimonies of those who witnessed the eviction.

For Human Rights movement is one of hundreds of Russian non-governmental organizations that have come under pressure in recent months as part of President Vladimir Putin's crackdown on dissent following unprecedented street protests last year. The situation has been aggravated with the fact that in the case of For Human Rights movement the authorities dared to act blatantly against the law using excessive violence without any hesitation.

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