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## **Statement of Concern regarding possible criminal prosecution of Russian Peace and Women's Rights activist**

We express our deepest concern about the possibility of criminal charges being brought against Ms. Valentina Cherevatenko, an outstanding Russian peace activist, a long-term GPPAC member, and the chair-coordinator of the NGOs Union "Women of the Don Region" and head "Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development". She has also played a leading role in the ongoing conference "Women for a Life without Wars and Violence" since 1996. This is a platform for joint peacebuilding and humanitarian activities of many organisations and activists from post-soviet states, especially Southern Russia and countries of the South Caucasus.

We are astonished that Ms. Cherevatenko, a well-known peace activist who has done so much for her country and society, is at risk of facing criminal charges for not denouncing her activities as the work of a "Foreign agent".

The Russian Investigation Committee has begun pre-investigation checks into alleged "malevolent evasion of duties imposed by the law on non-profit organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent." According to recently introduced legislation under article 330.1 of the Russian Criminal Code, such an offence may be punishable by up to two years in prison.

The alleged offence is not denouncing oneself as a "foreign agent" (commonly understood in Russia as identical to "spy"), for receiving foreign funding and engaging in any type of activity that may be focused on influencing public opinion or official policies. The investigation of Ms. Cherevatenko creates a dangerous precedent, as it is the first time that a case under article 330.1 has been opened against a civil society activist in Russia.

In recent years both organisations led by Ms. Cherevatenko have been labelled "foreign agents" by Russian authorities. Both groups submitted additional reports and audit statements and informed the public that they had been listed as "foreign agents," as required under the law. The Union paid all administrative fines imposed by the courts, and the Foundation applied for and received an extension. On February 29, the Ministry of Justice officially removed the Union "Women of the Don Region" from its list of "foreign agents", stating that the group no longer "carried out the functions of a foreign agent."

As members of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, we express our support for Ms. Cherevatenko. Her work in the volatile regions of the North Caucasus continues to have a positive impact on the lives of people there. Over the years, she has supported inter-ethnic dialogue and helped develop understanding between different peoples of Southern Russia, contributing to peace and stability in the region. The organisations she heads have implemented many dozens of important social projects, contributing to the wellbeing of many thousands of people in the regions of the North Caucasus.



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For many years Ms. Cherevatenko and her colleagues have worked on maintaining dialogue between people of the Chechen Republic and other Russian regions; setting up a network of trauma specialists; designing training courses for volunteer assistants to psychologists; organising mobile teams to offer psychosocial assistance to people after man-made or natural disasters (such as the terrorist attack in Beslan or the devastating flood in the city of Krymsk) and more. Ms. Valentina Cherevatenko was one of 1000 women activists nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Should it be understood that work for peace, human rights, inter-ethnic understanding, and human dignity is actually *against* official Russian policies and Russian interests? We hope that this is not the case. We hope that the current situation is not a result of any long-term policy, but of a bureaucratic misinterpretation of legislation at a local level.

We call upon Russian officials to take immediate measures to put an end to this shameful case and to ensure that Ms. Valentina Cherevatenko and the organisations she heads are able to continue the very important work they do for peace in Russia and the wellbeing of their fellow citizens.

*The [Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict \(GPPAC\)](#) is a global network of over two hundred civil society organisations working in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.*