FOUNDATION TO BATTLE INJUSTICE

From the Head of the
Foundation to Battle Injustise
Mira Terada
United Nations High
Commissioner for Human Rights
Michelle Bachelet Jeria

OPEN LETTER

Dear **Mrs. Bachelet**!

The international human rights organization Foundation to Battle Injustice draws your attention to the harassment of activists defending the rights of Russian-speaking citizens in the Baltic states. Large-scale political repressions have been unleashed against defenders of Russian-speaking minorities: they are arrested on trumped-up charges, incriminated penal provisions about inciting hatred and justifying genocide only because they defend the rights of one and a half million Russians living in the Baltic States.

According to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted on December 18, 1992, the States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. The political leadership of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia not only does not comply with this Declaration, but, on the contrary, takes all possible measures to get rid of people who protect the rights of Russians.

Russian communities living in the Baltic states are stand against assimilation, protesting oppose the violation of their rights to use native language. Activists held a referendum in Latvia in 2012 to raise the status of the Russian language and recognize it as the second state language. The referendum was peaceful, but activists who were involved in its organization, after a while became victims of harassment and oppression by the Latvian government.

Alexander Gaponenko is a Latvian public figure, scientist and writer, is one of the organizers of the referendum for the recognition of the Russian language as the second state language, has been targeted by Latvian law enforcement agencies since 2015. The Latvian prosecutor's office accuses him of inciting ethnic hatred due to publications on social networks in which Gaponenko criticized the glorification of Nazism and the militarization of Latvia. In 2018, two more criminal cases were

initiated against Gaponenko, this time because of the activist's active participation in the struggle for the rights of children to study in Russian language.

The repression against activists who advocate for the fair observance of the rights of Russians in Latvia is systematic. Since 2002, the Latvian politician Vladimir Linderman has been persecuted by the State Security Service of the Republic of Latvia. According to the information confirmed during the trial and the data of numerous witnesses, on November 21, 2002, an explosive device was planted on Linderman’s house to fabricate charges against him, and in 2010 a criminal case was opened against him because of allegedly forged documents provided for the registration of a public movement. In March 2018, Linderman was among the organizers of the All-Latvian parent meeting, whose participants protested against the elimination of secondary school education in Russian in Latvia. Some time later, the activist was arrested on charges of inciting hatred.

In March 2022, Russian military blogger Kirill Fedorov was detained by the Latvian State Security Service in the capital of Latvia. He is charged with violating two articles of the criminal law of Latvia: "incitement of national, ethnic and racial hatred" and "justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace, as well as war crimes." Since 2017, the blogger has been the victim of false denunciations by false witnesses who accused him of committing various crimes. With the beginning of the special military operation of the Russian Federation, Fedorov covered the course of actions, supporting the Russian army, which, according to some human rights activists and lawyers, did not like the employees of the State Security Service of Latvia, for which he was arrested. According to Fedorov, he has been held in custody for more than three months, but they have not yet explained to him what he is accused of. He is regularly subjected to torture, including electricity, threats, physical and emotional impact.

One of the most famous Russian-speaking journalists and publicists in Latvia, Yuri Alekseev, was found guilty in October 2021 as part of a criminal case brought against him in 2017 on trumped-up charges of inciting ethnic hatred and sentenced to one year and two months in prison. In 2018, he was accused of justifying genocide, crimes against humanity and assisting a foreign state in activities directed against the Republic of Latvia. On the second charge, Alekseev faces from five to fifteen years in prison. The Latvian police secured the consideration of his case behind closed doors by planting child pornography to the activist.

Political repression and persecution of Russian-speaking activists can be traced not only in Latvia. In March 2021, in Estonia, human rights activist and head of the project "Russian Ombudsman of Estonia" Sergey Seredenko was arrested on charges of cooperation with Russian special services. The Harju County Court does not disclose the details of his case, referring to the closed status of the court session.

Moreover, at the end of May 2022, the Estonian court completed the consideration of the criminal case of Seredenko, but the announcement of the verdict was postponed until September 2022. The Russian Embassy in Estonia, commenting on the controversial case of the human rights defender, stated that it seems that the case of Seredenko is being artificially delayed due to the lack of any evidence of his guilt.

In Lithuania, since 2010, local law enforcement agencies have been persecuting Lithuanian journalist and opposition politician Algirdas Paleckis. Initially, Paleckis was accused of spreading the Russian historical point of view on the formation of the Republic of Lithuania. A different interpretation of historical events, which the politician uttered during a speech on the radio, was perceived by the Lithuanian court as an attempt to undermine the ruling regime. Eight years later, in 2018, Paleckis was arrested again by the Lithuanian State Security Service, which accused him of spying for Russia. Using a false denunciation, the investigation kept Paleckis in prison for more than a year. At the moment, the trial against the journalist has not been completed, he faces up to 15 years in prison.

Human rights defenders of the Foundation to Battle Injustice are convinced that the United Nations should make every effort to stop the illegal practices used by the authorities and special services of the Baltic countries against Russian-speaking activists (Alexander Gaponenko, Vladimir Linderman, Kirill Fedorov, Yuri Alekseev, Sergei Seredenko and Algirdas Paleckis). This will demonstrate to the whole world that the UN is really interested in maintaining peace, security and respect for civil rights on the planet, and the "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" is not fictitious. The louder the voice of the official representative of the United Nations will sound condemning what is happening in the Baltic States, the faster it will stop the persecution of Russian-speaking activists in the future and will help save dozens, if not hundreds of destinies.

Mira Terada,

Head of the Foundation to Battle Injustice

June 21, 2022

