



HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE  
FOUNDATION

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Oslo and Geneva, 29 May 2013

Dear Mr. Gennadiy Vasilevitch,

**The Human Rights House Foundation is deeply concerned to learn from its partners of the Human Rights House Voronezh that the Voronezh city district administration has decided to cease its rental agreement.**

The Human Rights House Voronezh is located Cjurupy, 34, and formally the rent contract for the whole Human Rights House Voronezh is signed by two independent human rights organisations, the International Youth Human Rights Movement and the Confederation of Free Labor. They have received on 17 and 22 May 2013 the Department of Property and Estate Relations of the Voronezh City Administration the information that their leases were ceased and that they shall leave the premises. The official reason invoked in local media is that the building shall be used as a youth centre.

The Human Rights House Voronezh has been located in its actual premises for over the last 20 years and consists of several organisations working to ensure protection of the rights of citizens and the promotion of human rights. The activities of the participating organisations of the Human Rights House Voronezh are known both in the Russia Federation and abroad, confirming the crucial role of civil society organisations in promoting mutual understanding and trust between the State and civil society.

During the last years the work of the Human Rights House Voronezh offered a great contribution to the city of Voronezh, including by participating at its activities. As an example, in April 2011, the International Youth Human Rights Movement organised the conference of the INGO of the Council of Europe, attended by organisations from all over the Russian Federation, as well as by the Federal Ombudsman Office and the Regional Ombudsman. The Human Rights House Voronezh performs

services of public utility in the interest of the community of Voronezh and of the entire Russian civil society. Thanks to the Human Rights House Voronezh, film directors, public figures, including academic experts, musicians and artists from the Russian Federation and other countries visit Voronezh. The work of our colleagues in Voronezh is widely recognised and internationally respected.

The possible eviction of the Human Rights House Voronezh will not only damage the entire group of organisations sharing the premises but also affect the image of the city of Voronezh.

In 2009 and 2010, attempts to evict the Human Rights House Voronezh had already been undertaken, and successfully the International Youth Human Rights Movement and the Confederation of Free Labor achieved to have their rental agreements signed for a new period until 2013, which were then extended until 2017.

The new attempt to evict the Human Rights House Voronezh is now even more worrying, given the situation faced by independent human rights organisations in the Russian Federation. On 14 May 2013, three United Nations independent human rights experts<sup>1</sup> expressed serious concern at the “obstructive, intimidating and stigmatizing effects” brought about by the new legislations on NGO’s and declared as unacceptable this increasingly hostile environment for NGOs.

Since 2012, the Human Rights House Voronezh is a member of the Human Rights House Network, which unites 87 human rights NGOs joining forces in independent Human Rights Houses in 16 countries in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, East and Horn of Africa, and Western Europe. HRHN’s aim is to protect, empower and support human rights organisations locally and unite them in an international network of Human Rights Houses.

**The Human Rights House Foundation therefore urge you to ensure that the Voronezh city district administration cancelled the termination of the rental agreements and provides for a renewed period a rental agreement to the International Youth Human Rights Movement and the Confederation of Free Labor.**

**Given the particular importance of the work done by the Human Rights House Voronezh in your city, we also believe a free rent agreement could be offered to the Human Rights House Voronezh.** This would be an important way to, in line with your municipal mandate, support nationally and internationally recognised and respected human rights defenders and their NGOs, in line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>2</sup> It is also a way of fulfilling your obligations under international human rights law, by creating a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders can operate free from hindrance and insecurity, in the whole country and in all sectors of society, including by extending support to local human rights defenders, as stated by the United Nations Human Rights Council in its resolution on protecting human rights defenders adopted unanimously on 21 March 2013.

Yours sincerely,



Maria Dahle  
Executive Director

Human Rights House Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations press release:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13323&LangID=E>

<sup>2</sup> Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1998.