

URGENT ACTION

RUSSIA DROPS CASE AGAINST RIGHTS DEFENDER

The criminal case against prominent Russian human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko for “violation of ‘foreign agents’ law” was closed on 19 June due to an “absence of the elements of the crime”. She was not informed of the decision and only learnt of it by accident over a month later.

On 24 July, a lawyer from Piatigorsk in the Russian North Caucasus received a reply to his enquiry about **Valentina Cherevatenko**'s case. The reply from the North Caucasus Department of the Prosecutor General's Office, dated 14 July, stated that the case had been closed on 19 June. Colleagues from Amnesty International Sweden shared a similar response one of their activists received around the same time.

Neither Valentina Cherevatenko nor her lawyer had been informed by the Russian authorities about the case closure and at first suspected it was a baseless rumour, especially given that on 19 June, the very date they later learned the case had been closed, Valentina Cherevatenko and her lawyer attended a meeting with an investigator, about an unrelated matter, who had formerly been working on the case. He told them he did not know what was happening with the case and was surprised the case had yet to be taken to court. They received no information about the case from the most recently involved investigator either. Hence why, when news first broke out of the case being dropped, their initial reaction was one of suspicion.

Valentina Cherevatenko's lawyer travelled to Piatigorsk and on 31 July managed to obtain an official copy of the decision to close the case. The decision quoted “absence of the elements of the crime” as the reason for dropping the charges against her and terminating the case. In other words, the authorities recognised that Valentina Cherevatenko had not committed the offence of which they have accused her.

This is great news not only for Valentina Cherevatenko but for the Russian civil society as a whole, bringing hope that there is space for positive change. Valentina Cherevatenko sends a huge "THANK YOU!" and warmest regards to everyone who has been working on her case. She believes this is our common victory! She also told us that according to reliable sources, international support played a big and important role in the outcome of her case.

We will continue our work to ensure that NGOs and human rights defenders in Russia can work freely, without fear of persecution and prosecution.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the third update of UA 121/16. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/6461/2017/en/

Name: Valentina Cherevatenko
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