Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Ref.: AL RUS 10/2022
(Please use this reference in your reply)

30 August 2022

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 43/16, 42/22, 45/3, 43/4 and 49/10.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency’s Government information we have received concerning the alleged enforced disappearance of Ms. Irina Danilovich, her alleged arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, criminalisation, home search and seizure of her electronic devices and documents, as well as her designation as a “mass media foreign agent”, all of which was reportedly in connection with her legitimate human rights work and the exercise of the freedom of expression.

Ms. Irina Danilovich is a woman human rights defender, trade unionist, civic journalist, and nurse. She advocates for the rights of health workers through her project “Crimean Medicine Without a Cover”. Since 24 February 2022, she has also reportedly been critical about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The enforced disappearance of Ms. Irina Danilovich was examined by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances under its humanitarian procedure and transmitted to your Excellency’s Government under the Working Group’s urgent procedure on 9 May 2022 (G/SO 217/ Russian Federation). The case of Ms. Danilovich was then clarified based on information provided by sources on 11 May 2022.


1 References to Crimea should be read in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 68/262, in which the General Assembly affirmed its commitment “to the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders” (A/RES/68/262, Paragraph 1).
26 January 2022, and 8 June 2022. However, in view of the allegations below, we remain concerned about the broader environment human rights defenders are working in the territory of Crimea, and the challenges they face to their legitimate activities.

We also wrote to your Excellency’s Government on 5 February 2018 (OL RUS 2/2018) regarding the adoption and subsequent amendments to Federal Law No. 327-FZ dated 25 November 2017 (“Foreign Agent Media Law”) and welcomed the Excellency’s Government reply dated 6 April 2018. However, we remain concerned given the allegations below.

According to the information received:

On 29 April 2022, Ms. Irina Danilovich was reportedly abducted in the town of Koktebel when returning home from work. Four men in civilian clothing reportedly dragged her into a car and drove her away.

On the same day, the Special Purpose Mobile Unit of the National Guard of Russia reportedly searched the house in the village of Vladyshlavivka, where Ms. Danilovich lived with her parents. They reportedly did not identify themselves, and while they read out a court order authorising the search, they did not provide a copy. During the search they reportedly seized Ms. Danilovich’s laptop, her and her relatives’ phones, several books and documents. The individuals did not leave a copy of the search report or any record of the seized items. Ms. Danilovich’s parents were allegedly not informed of her whereabouts. They were told by those searching the house that she had been arrested for ten days for the alleged cooperation with a foreign State.

On 29 April 2022, Ms. Danilovich was reportedly taken to the Russian Federal Security Service (“FSS”) headquarters in Simferopol. She reportedly underwent a full body search recorded on a video camera, during which nothing suspicious was found.

Between 29 April and 7 May 2022, Ms. Danilovich was reportedly held in the basement of the FSS headquarters in Simferopol, without access to a lawyer of her choice and to her family, under constant psychological pressure. During this time, she reportedly was given one meal a day and access to a toilet only twice a day. The FSS investigators reportedly put a bag over her head and threatened, should she hide information, to take her “into the woods” or to the besieged city of Mariupol, where she would be “lost”.

For three days she was reportedly interrogated using a polygraph. The questions concerned her alleged connections with foreign intelligence services, media, a local human rights group, and some other organisations. It is reported that Ms. Irina Danilovich answered negatively to all questions and the polygraph confirmed this.

The FSS also reportedly insisted that she signed a confession of having committed a crime. It is unclear which crime this related to and whether she confessed. They reportedly forced Ms. Danilovich to sign an unknown protocol, two blank sheets of paper, and to say on camera that no pressure was used against her.
On 7 May 2022, the Investigative Directorate of the FSS opened a criminal case concerning the “illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transportation or carrying of explosives or explosive devices” (article 222.1 (1) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and formally detained her. The explosives were allegedly found in the glasses case inside the bag, which had been taken away from her three days after her arrival to the FSS headquarters. It is unclear if she is also accused of committing any other crimes.

On 7 May 2022, the Kyiv District Court of Simferopol placed Ms. Danilovich in pre-trial detention for a month and 29 days. She was reportedly represented by a State-appointed lawyer, despite having signed an agreement with another lawyer who could not locate her and have access to her since she had been subjected to enforced disappearance.

Ms. Danilovich’s whereabouts remained unknown to her family, friends, and lawyer for 13 days since the day of her disappearance. On 11 May 2022, after a long independent search, they found her at the pre-detention centre in Simferopol.

On 13 May 2022, she was charged in the presence of a lawyer of her own choosing.

On 27 May 2022, the Supreme Court of Crimea upheld Ms. Danilovich’s pre-trial detention on appeal.

On 3 June 2022, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation designated Ms. Danilovich as a “mass media foreign agent” under the Foreign Agent Media Law.

On 5 July 2022, the Kyiv District Court of Simferopol extended her pre-trial detention until 6 September 2022.

On 22 August 2022, the Feodosia City Court in the Republic of Crimea commenced a trial against Ms. Danilovich and held a first preliminary hearing behind closed doors. She was accused of "illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transportation, or carrying of explosives or explosive devices" as per Part 1, Article 222.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. On the same day, the court reviewed the conditions of pre-trial detention and extended Ms. Danilovich’s pre-trial in detention until 2 February 2023. The next hearing is scheduled for 29 August 2022.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we wish to express concern about the alleged enforced disappearance of Ms. Irina Danilovich, her alleged arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, criminalisation, home search and seizure of her electronic devices and documents, and her designation as a “foreign agent mass media”, all of which appear to be related to her legitimate human rights work and the exercise of the freedom of expression.

We also express our grave concern regarding the continuous intimidation and harassment of the human rights defenders in Crimea in connection to their human rights work, in particular, the chilling effect that this could have on human rights
defenders in Crimea, discouraging them from exercising their rights. In line with the previous observations of the Human Rights Council, we remind Your Excellency’s Government of the importance of ensuring that national security is not used to unjustifiably or arbitrarily restrict the right to freedom of opinion and expression (A/HRC/7/36). We recall that legitimate expression of opinions or thought must not be criminalised and that measures aimed to regulate the existence and work of civil society and human rights defenders must comply with the requirements of proportionality, necessity, and non-discrimination. National security legislation should not be misused against individuals peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful association, and assembly. These rights are protected under the ICCPR, and the non-violent exercise of these rights cannot be a criminal offense.

We also express our concern about the alleged irregularities in Ms. Danilovich’s arrest and the lack of judicial guarantees provided to her during her detention, which appear to be incompatible with the right to fair trial and due process. We underline that all individuals, regardless of the severity of the charges brought against them, have a right to due process and fair trial, in compliance with the rule of law. The right to a fair trial is recognized not only in human rights treaties but also within international humanitarian law, international criminal law, counterterrorism conventions and customary international law (see A/63/223). We remind your Excellency’s Government that article 14 of the ICCPR, ratified by the Russian Federation, provides, inter alia, for the principle of equality before competent, independent, and impartial courts and tribunals, the presumption of innocence, provision of adequate time and facilities for the preparation of the defense, and the right of accused persons to communicate with counsel of their own choosing.

Furthermore, noting that the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation has designated Ms. Danilovich as a “mass media foreign agent” under the Foreign Agent Media Law, we reiterate our concerns expressed in RUS 2/2018 and RUS 2/2022 about the detrimental effect of this designation on human rights defenders, in particular those expressing dissenting views, and the limitations on their rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression in the country, including in their advocacy work.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the Annex on Reference to international human rights law attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

We are issuing this appeal to safeguard the rights of Ms. Danilovich from irreparable harm and without prejudicing any eventual legal determination.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.

2. Please provide information on the investigations into the enforced disappearance and ill-treatment of Ms. Danilovich, and the steps taken
to ensure accountability of any person(s) responsible.

3. Please provide information on the legal and factual basis for the arrest and detention of Ms. Irina Danilovich, on the conditions of her detention and her state of health, the home search and seizure of her electronic devices and documents, her designation as a “mass media foreign agent”, and any criminal cases against her, and explain how these are compatible with your Excellency’s Government’s international human rights obligations. Please also indicate how this is in compliance with the principle of proportionality, necessity and non-discrimination.

4. Please provide information as to the measures taken to ensure that Ms. Danilovich’s fair trial rights and right to legal representation are respected, and explain how these measures are compatible with Egypt’s international human rights obligations.

5. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that human rights defenders in Crimea can exercise their right to freedom of expression and carry out their legitimate work freely and in a safe and enabling environment without acts of intimidation and harassment.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency’s Government will be made public via the communications reporting website within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any irreparable harm to the life or personal integrity of Ms. Danilovich, to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We would like to inform your Excellency’s Government that after having transmitted an allegation letter to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. Such letters in no way prejudice any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to the allegation letter and the regular procedure.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency’s Government to clarify the issue/s in question.

In accordance with General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and taking into account General Assembly Resolutions 76/179, 75/192, 74/168, 73/263, 72/190, and 71/205 on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, we wish to inform you that a copy of this letter will also be sent to the authorities of Ukraine for
their information.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Mary Lawlor  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Mumba Malila  
Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Luciano Hazan  
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Irene Khan  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Fionnuala Ni Aoláin  
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism
Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency’s Government to the following human rights standards.

We would like to refer your Excellency’s Government to article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”), ratified by the Russian Federation on 16 October 1973, which guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that any restrictions to the right to freedom of expression must meet the criteria established by international human rights standards, such as article 19 (3) of the ICCPR. Under these standards, restrictions must be provided for by law and conform to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality. Article 19 (3) may never be invoked to justify the muzzling of any advocacy of human rights (paragraph 23). Nor, under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of his or her freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest, torture, threats to life and killing, be compatible with article 19 (Id.).

We would furthermore like to refer to articles 6, 7, 9, 14 and 17 of the ICCPR, which guarantee the right to life, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to a fair trial, and the right to privacy. We would like to stress that, in General Comment No. 35 (CCPR/C/GC/35), the Human Rights Committee has stated that arresting or detaining an individual as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights guaranteed by the ICCPR, including freedom of opinion and expression, is arbitrary (paragraph 17). This has also been confirmed by the consistent jurisprudence of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which has also reiterated that a deprivation of liberty is arbitrary when it constitutes a violation of international law on the grounds of discrimination based on birth, national, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, economic condition, political or other opinion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or any other status, that aims towards or can result in ignoring the equality of human beings. As per the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, detention on the basis of an individual’s status as a human rights defender is discriminatory and therefore arbitrary. Further, the right to challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court, protected under article 9 of the ICCPR is a self-standing human right and a peremptory norm of international law, which applies to all forms of arbitrary deprivation of liberty. As stated by the Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 35, and reiterated by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, it is a well-established norm of international law that pre-trial detention should be the exception rather than the rule, and should be ordered for the shortest time possible.

We would also like to remind your Excellency’s Government that article 14 of the Covenant, as well as principle 9 and guideline 8 of the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Remedies and Procedures on the Right of Anyone Deprived of Their Liberty to Bring Proceedings Before a Court, require that all persons deprived of their liberty have the right to legal assistance by counsel of their choice at any time during their detention, including immediately after their

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2 See A/HRC/30/37, paras. 2, 3 and 11.
apprehension, and that such access be provided without delay. The denial of access to lawyers of one's choosing violates the right to legal assistance guaranteed under article 14 of the Covenant, articles 10 and 11 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, principles 15, 17 and 18 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, and rule 61 (1) of the Nelson Mandela Rules.

The right to freedom of expression includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds. As interpreted by the Human Rights Committee in General Comment No. 34 (CCPR/C/GC/34), such information and ideas include commentary on one’s own and on public affairs, discussion of human rights, and journalism (paragraph 11). All forms of expression and means of their dissemination are protected (paragraph 12).

With regard to the alleged enforced disappearance, according to the General Comment No. 35 (CCPR/C/GC/35), paragraph 17, General Comment No. 36 (CCPR/C/GC/36), paragraphs 57-58, as well as the jurisprudence of the Human Rights Committee and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, these would amount to violations of article 6 (right to life), article 7 (prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), article 9 (liberty and security of person), article 10 (right to a fair and public hearing) and article 16 (right to recognition as a person before the law) of the ICCPR, read alone and in conjunction with article 2 (3). Equally, the right not to be subjected to an enforced disappearance is of a non-derogable nature and the prohibition of this crime has attained the status of jus cogens. Pursuant to article 7 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, no circumstances whatsoever, whether a threat of war, a state of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked to justify enforced disappearance. Moreover, articles 9-12 establish the guarantees to be afforded to any person deprived of liberty and article 13 of the Declaration sets forth the State’s obligation to investigate promptly, thoroughly and impartially any complaints of enforced disappearance. Article 19 of the Declaration requires that victims of acts of enforced disappearance and their families obtain redress and integral reparation for the harm suffered.

We would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that enforced disappearance has different impact depending on whom it targets. For instance, according to the Study on enforced or involuntary disappearances and economic, social and cultural rights by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/30/38/Add.5), human rights defenders are also targeted to intimidate and prevent others from claiming and exercising their rights. Due to collective character of certain economic, social and cultural rights, the disappearance of one person may have a negative effect on the larger community. Similarly, the General comment on women affected by enforced disappearances adopted by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/WGEID/98/2) stresses, inter alia, the differentiated effects of enforced disappearances in women and girls. In particular, States must acknowledge disappeared women, and recognize the particular types of harm they suffer based on their gender, including instances of sexual violence, and the resulting psychological damage and social stigma as well as the disruption of family structures.

3 A/HRC/45/16, para. 51.
We wish to remind your Excellency’s Government that according to paragraph 10 of the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No. 31 [80] (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add. 13), States Parties must respect and ensure the rights laid down in the ICCPR to anyone within their power or effective control, even if not situated within their territory. The enjoyment of the ICCPR rights is not limited to citizens of States Parties but must also be available to all individuals, regardless of nationality or statelessness, who may find themselves subject to the jurisdiction of the State Party. This principle also applies to those within the power or effective control of the forces of a State Party acting outside its territory, regardless of the circumstances in which such power or effective control was obtained.

Likewise, we wish to remind your Excellency’s Government that according to paragraph 5 of the Committee Against Torture’s General Comment No. 2 (CAT/C/GC/2), no exceptional circumstances whatsoever (including a state of war or threat thereof, internal political instability or any other public emergency, any threat of terrorist acts or violent crime, armed conflict, international or non-international) may be invoked by a State Party to justify acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction. According to paragraph 7, the concept of “any territory under its jurisdiction” must be applied to protect any person, citizen or non-citizen without discrimination subject to the de jure or de facto control of a State Party, and the State’s obligation to prevent torture also applies to all persons who act, de jure or de facto, in the name of, in conjunction with, or at the behest of the State Party.

In Resolution 76/179 and previous resolutions on the situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, the General Assembly urged the Russian Federation to, inter alia, “uphold all of its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power” and “create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers and citizen journalists, human rights defenders and defence lawyers to perform their work independently and without undue interference in Crimea” (A/RES/76/179, paragraphs 6 (a), (m)).

Furthermore, we would like to refer your Excellency’s Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted on 9 December 1998 (also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). Articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Likewise, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency’s Government the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- Article 6 (a), (b) and (c), which provides for the right to know, seek, obtain, receive, and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms; to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to draw public attention to
those matters;

- Article 9 (1), which establishes that in the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights, everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights;

- Article 12 (2) and (3), which provides that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure, or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of their legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration. In this connection, everyone is entitled, individually and in association with others, to be protected effectively under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, activities, and acts, including those by omission, attributable to States that result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and acts of violence perpetrated by groups or individuals that affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We also recall your Excellency’s Government that Human Rights Council resolution 22/6 on the protection of human rights defenders calls upon states to ensure that no one is subject to excessive or indiscriminate use of force, arbitrary arrest or detention, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance, abuse of criminal and civil proceedings or threats of such acts. It also urges States to ensure that measures to combat terrorism and preserve national security are in compliance with their obligations under international law and do not hinder the work and safety of individuals, groups and organs of society engaged in promoting and defending human rights.

We would also like to stress the attention to the findings of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls which highlighted that the measures to combat terrorism and national security measures sometimes profile and target women, in particular those from certain groups, and sometimes even women human rights defenders(A/HRC/41/33). It has further recommended States ensure that measures addressing conflict, crisis, terrorism, and national security incorporate a women’s human rights focus and do not instrumentalize women’s deprivation of liberty for the purposes of pursuing government aims.

We would like to underline that any restriction on expression or information that a government seeks to justify on grounds of national security and counter-terrorism must have the genuine purpose and demonstrable effect of protecting a legitimate national security interest (CCPR/C/GC/34). Counter-terrorism legislation with penal sanctions should not be misused against individuals peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful association and assembly. These rights are protected under ICCPR, and non-violent exercise of these rights is not a criminal offence. Counter-terrorism legislation should not be used as an excuse to suppress peaceful minority groups and their members.

Assembly resolution 49/60, 51/210, 72/123 and 72/180. All these resolutions require that States must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism and violent extremism, including incitement of and support for terrorist acts, comply with all of their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, refugee law, and humanitarian law.

We would like to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 22/6, which urges States to ensure that measures to combat terrorism and preserve national security are in compliance with their obligations under international law and do not hinder the work and safety of individuals, groups and organs of society engaged in promoting and defending human rights. We would also like to remind your Excellency’s Government that the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism urged States to ensure that their counter-terrorism legislation is sufficiently precise to comply with the principle of legality, so as to prevent the possibility that it may be used to target civil society on political or other unjustified grounds. (A/70/371, para 46(b)).

Finally, we would like to bring the attention of the Government to paragraphs 75(a) to (i) of the 2018 report of the Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism’s (A/HRC/40/52) on the impact of terrorism measures on civic spaces and human rights defenders.