

President of the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic

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Dear President of the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic,

I am writing to ask you to take action in support of your colleague, lawyer Lilia Hemedzhy. She was disbarred on 15 July 2022, in retaliation for discharging her professional duties while representing members of the Crimean Tatar Muslim community in Crimea. As you will be aware this decision was reversed, but then challenged in a Crimean court by the Bar Association of Crimea.

Lilia Hemedzhy has been repeatedly pressured by the authorities in Crimea to stop providing legal assistance to members of the Crimean Tatar community. She was threatened with disbarment by law enforcement agencies, and to this end complaints against her were submitted to the Bar Association with false accusations of her “disrespecting” the court, repeatedly violating court proceedings, arguing with the presiding judge, and disobeying the bailiff. Meanwhile, the Bar Association of Crimea arbitrarily declined her request of transfer and filed a lawsuit in the Zheleznodorozhnyi District Court of Simferopol, Crimea, against Lilia Hemedzhy as a member of your Bar Association. The same lawsuit insisted on invalidating the original decision of the Qualification Commission of your Bar Association which had attested Lilia Hemedzhy's professional credentials.

The Crimean court's ruling of 20 March 2023 against Lilia Hemedzhy leaves her clients, most of them Muslims, without effective legal representation in the face of persecution by the local authorities. It deprives them of their human rights, including the right to a fair trial and the right to practise their religion freely. It also has a significant chilling effect on work of the legal professionals in Crimea as well as in the Russian Federation. Lilia Hemedzhy is preparing an appeal against her disbarment.

I therefore urge you and the Bar Association of the Chechen Republic to take a stance in support of your colleague, and specifically:

- Provide Lilia Hemedzhy with all necessary support and legal assistance to stop the harmful and intimidating practises aimed at preventing her from carrying on her work as a lawyer on behalf of her Muslim clients in Crimea;
- Support Lilia Hemedzhy's appeal process all the way to the court of final instance, and directly appeal the decision of the Zheleznodorozhnyi District Court of Simferopol, Crimea, on behalf of you Bar Association.

Yours sincerely,