

URGENT ACTION

LGBTI AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST UNDER ARREST

Russian activist and artist, Yulia Tsvetkova, is facing prosecution and harassment for defending women's and LGBTI rights. She has been under house arrest since 22 November, under absurd charges of "production and dissemination of pornography" for her drawings of the female body. She is facing up to six years in prison if convicted. Yulia Tsvetkova is a prisoner of conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Boris Viktorovich Kononenko
Prosecutor of Komsomolsk-on-Amur
Krasnogvardeiskaya street, 34
Komsomolsk-on-Amur 681013
Russian Federation
Email: kms@phk.hbr.ru*

Dear Prosecutor,

I am writing to express my indignation about the arrest and prosecution of Yulia Tsvetkova, an artist and activist from Komsomolsk-on-Amur. She is facing criminal and administrative proceedings that have been initiated on absurd grounds.

On 20 November Yulia Tsvetkova was arbitrarily detained and questioned by police. The same day they searched her flat and previous place of employment. She has been under house arrest since 22 November, while an investigation against her is being conducted, on charges of "production and dissemination of pornography", a crime, which carries a penalty of up to six years in prison. The criminal proceedings against her are based on her drawings of the female body.

Yulia Tsvetkova is facing relentless harassment: on several occasions the investigator has denied her requests to visit her dentist, and on 5 February she was subjected to a psychiatric examination. She has also been targeted under the Code of Administrative Offences. On 11 December, she was issued with an extortionate fine of 50,000 rubles (approximately 600 GBP) for creating so-called "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors", because she is the administrator of two LGBTI-themed online communities. These proceedings arise under homophobic legislation, which expressly discriminates against LGBTI people and violates their right to freedom of expression. These proceedings are absurd and unfounded, even under Russian law. Both of the online communities in question were marked "18+", as required by Russian law, and as such were not targeted at minors. Further administrative proceedings have been instigated against Yulia Tsvetkova for the same "offence".

The only reason Yulia Tsvetkova is facing prosecution is for her activism and for exercising her right to freedom of expression; through which she seeks to promote and defend women's rights and the rights of LGBTI people. She is a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to end Yulia Tsvetkova's prosecution, under both criminal and administrative charges, and to ensure her immediate and unconditional release.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yulia Tsvetkova, an artist and stage director from Komsomolsk-on-Amur (Russian Far East), was detained on 20 November 2019 and put under house arrest two days later after being charged with “production and dissemination of pornographic materials” (Point B, Part 3, Article 242 of the Russian Criminal Code). The basis for these absurd charges were her drawings of the female body; including body-positive pictures of female reproductive organs, which she posted on social media as part of her women empowerment campaign. On the day of her detention, searches were carried out in Yulia Tsvetkova’s apartment and in the children’s educational club where she previously worked. The police seized her electronic devices, documents, and brochures on gender issues. Yulia Tsvetkova said that during the search the police officers stated that she was a “lesbian, sex trainer and propagandist leader”.

Earlier, on 11 December 2019, she was found guilty of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”, an administrative offense under Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences and fined 50,000 rubles (approximately 600 GBP) for being the administrator of two LGBTI-themed online communities on the popular Russian social media site, VKontakte. Both online communities were marked “18+”, as required by Russian law, making the fine imposed on her unfounded even under the homophobic Russian “gay propaganda” legislation (this “offence” is only valid if the “propaganda” material is targeted at persons under 18).

On 17 January, Yulia Tsvetkova informed the media that new proceedings had been opened against her, under the same Article of the Code of Administrative Offences. This time she was being prosecuted for posting a drawing she made depicting two same-sex couples with child on social media, alongside the statement, “Family is where love is. Support LGBT+ families”. She published the drawing in support of a same-sex couple who were forced to flee Russia with their adopted children after authorities threatened to remove their children from their custody.

Yulia Tsvetkova has been the target of an overtly homophobic campaign since March 2019, when she was forced to leave Merak, the amateur youth theatre company she worked at, after police launched an investigation into alleged “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”. The investigation was launched in reaction to Yulia’s anti-bullying, anti-discrimination play, *Blue and Pink*. The theatrical group Yulia founded in 2018 was also forced to cease all activities.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 March 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Yulia Tsvetkova (she/her)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS: Embassy of Russia, 6/7 Kensington Palace Gardens, Kensington, London W8 4QP