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Russia Opens Criminal Case Against Memorial Co-Chair Following Raids

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Memorial board members Oleg Orlov and Jan Rachinsky. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

Recast to add Orlov's criminal charges.

Russian authorities have opened a criminal case against the co-chair of Nobel Peace Prize-winning civil rights group Memorial on Tuesday following sweeping raids against the group's members.

Oleg Orlov has been charged with repeatedly violating Russia's law against "discrediting" the army, Memorial said on its Telegram channel. The law, passed last March, effectively outlaws criticism of the invasion of Ukraine.

If convicted, he faces up to three years in prison.

Orlov, who was released on bail later Tuesday, was accused over a November 2022 Facebook post in which he republished his own article in a French outlet entitled "They Wanted Fascism. They Got It," Memorial said.

He was among several members of Memorial to have been targeted in coordinated police raids in Moscow on Tuesday morning.

The searches began at around 7:30 a.m. Moscow time and were believed to be linked to a recently launched criminal investigation into the group's alleged "rehabilitation of Nazism."

Police officers finished searching around 3:30 p.m. Moscow time, Memorial said. At least two members of Memorial were taken to the Investigative Committee.

Russian investigators previously opened a criminal probe of the group on the same grounds in early February 2022, weeks prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Both cases center around allegations that Memorial's database of more than 3 million victims of Soviet repression contains a handful of Nazi collaborators.

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The latest "rehabilitation of Nazism" case, which Memorial said was launched on March 3, 2023, lists two people who were sentenced for working for the German police and one who was sentenced for treason against the Soviet Union.

The "rehabilitation of Nazism" is punishable by up to five years in prison under Russian law.

Memorial's lawyers said they were prevented from gaining access to Memorial staff by security agents.

Memorial named at least eight of its members, one of their relatives, and two office locations that were targeted in the raids.

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According to Memorial's Telegram channel, Investigative Committee officers jointly carried out the raids with agents from the Interior Ministry's anti-extremism unit.

Founded in 1989, Memorial has for decades shed light on crimes committed by Josef Stalin's totalitarian regime, worked to preserve the memory of its victims, and documented human rights violations in Russia.

Russia's Supreme Court in 2021 ordered the group to disband, then ordered a raid of its Moscow offices on Oct. 7, 2022 — the day it was announced as one of the three winners of last year's Nobel Peace Prize.

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