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Former Members of Youth Activist Group Arrested Across Russia

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Vesna has become a major voice in Russia's anti-war movement. **Vesna movement**

Russian law enforcement officials arrested six former and current members of the democratic youth organization Vesna on charges of "extremism," state-run media outlets reported Wednesday.

The individuals — who were detained in various cities across Russia — are accused of "forming an extremist organization."

"All of those arrested were taken to Moscow. Before that, their homes were searched," an unidentified law enforcement official was quoted as saying by the TASS news agency.

Founded in 2013 by former members of Russia's center-right Yabloko party, Vesna has grown into one of the largest Russian opposition networks and is a major voice in the country's anti-war movement.

Russia added Vesna to its list of banned "terrorist and extremist" organizations last year.

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RIA Novosti, citing law enforcement, reported that criminal charges were filed against the six individuals for disseminating "fakes" about the army, calling for activities against state security, organizing an extremist community and the rehabilitation of Nazism.

According to the OVD-Info civil rights organization, the homes of at least four of the arrested individuals were searched on Tuesday, after which they were detained and sent to Moscow.

Vesna denied that those arrested were current members and noted that some were "in no way connected" with the organization.

It accused Russian authorities of "seeking revenge" against the organization, which today mostly operates in exile abroad.

"They are persecuting our former activists who for a long time have had nothing to do with the movement. They file an insane amount of absurd charges against them to put pressure on us," the organization said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app.

Vesna said only five of its former members were arrested.

"These criminal charges are monstrous political crackdown and demonstrative repression so that no one dares even think about supporting us and the anti-war movement," it continued.

One member of Vesna told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity that he doubted the arrests would have an impact on the organization's work.

"Vesna will continue fighting against the Putin regime, against his aggression in Ukraine, just as it had been doing before," he said.

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