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Russia Bans Minority Advocacy Group Free Buryatia

By AFP

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A protester rallies against Russia's "partial" military mobilization in the republic of Buryatia's capital, Ulan-Ude, in September 2022. **t.me/Baikal_People**

Russia on Friday branded the non-governmental organization Free Buryatia as "undesirable," a label that criminalizes the group and puts its staff at risk of prosecution.

The NGO was created in March 2022 and focuses on the rights of mobilized Buryats — an ethnic minority in Siberia — and provides them with legal advice.

Russia was accused of disproportionately enlisting conscripts from ethnic minorities in Siberia to fight in Ukraine, particularly during mobilization in September 2022.

"The activities of the foreign foundation, involved in organizing anti-Russian actions, have been declared undesirable in our country," the prosecutor's office said on Telegram.

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It accused the foundation of "organizing mass protests on the territory of Buryatia and attempting to enlarge the circle of supporters of potential separatist movements."

"In addition, the organization provides legal assistance in the cancellation of contracts for service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation," the prosecutor said.

The label has been extensively used to stifle opponents and activists.

Authorities are taking the crackdown on freedoms in Russia to an unprecedented level over a year into Moscow's assault on Ukraine, with independent media and rights groups shut down and most key opposition figures behind bars or in exile.

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