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Russia Designates Draft Dodging Nonprofit as 'Foreign Agent'

By Mack Tubridy

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Grigory Sverdlin, founder of the "Idite Lesom" project. **Social media**

Authorities in Moscow designated Idite Lesom, an exiled nonprofit that helps Russian men avoid military service, as a "foreign agent" on Friday.

The organization, founded in Tbilisi, Georgia after Russia announced a "partial" mobilization in the fall of 2022, is led by Grigory Sverdlin, a former head of the Nochlezhka homeless aid charity. Sverdlin was himself labeled a "foreign agent" in November 2023.

Russia's Justice Ministry accused Idite Lesom of spreading false information about government policies to "form a negative image" of the military, which has been engaged in a full-scale invasion of Ukraine for nearly three years.

Sverdlin, who fled Russia shortly after the invasion began in 2022, ridiculed the designation. He said his nonprofit has helped nearly 1,500 soldiers desert the Russian army and assisted

nearly 43,000 men in avoiding conscription altogether.

“We’ve been working for over two years, and they’re only declaring us foreign agents now,” Sverdlin told The Moscow Times. “I hope the authorized employees [of Russia’s Justice Ministry] will be reprimanded.”

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Alongside Idite Lesom, which means “get lost” in Russian, authorities on Friday added publisher Alaya Bukva, analyst Alexandra Prokopenko, as well as journalists Ksenia Kiriya, Andrei Kozenko, Anastasia Lotareva, Irena Romaliyska and Anton Rubin to the “foreign agent” registry.

Since Russia introduced its “foreign agent” law in 2012, more than 900 journalists, cultural figures, businesspeople, organizations and news outlets have been branded with the label, which carries strong Soviet-era connotations of espionage.

Russian authorities have continued to tighten restrictions on those branded as “foreign agents,” including barring them from advertising, running for political office and earning income from property sales or royalties.

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