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Russia's Supreme Court Designates Nobel Prize-Winning Memorial as 'Extremist'

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Police stand outside the Moscow office of the Memorial human rights center. **Mikhail Metzel / TASS**

Russia's Supreme Court on Thursday declared the Nobel Prize-winning human rights organization Memorial an "extremist" group, a designation that effectively criminalizes its remaining operations and exposes its supporters to criminal prosecution.

The ruling targets what the court termed the "Memorial international public movement," an umbrella designation that the group itself notes has no formal legal entity, but which allows authorities to shutter any remaining projects or "structural divisions" linked to its name.

In a statement, the Supreme Court justified the ban by claiming Memorial's activities are "markedly anti-Russian" and intended to "erode historical, cultural, spiritual and moral values" while undermining the "fundamental pillars of Russian statehood."

Memorial was founded in 1987 to document Soviet-era political repression, a mission that has

increasingly clashed with the state's efforts to elevate the image of the U.S.S.R. under President Vladimir Putin.

The extremist label carries severe legal consequences. Authorities can now pursue criminal charges against any Russian citizen who cooperates with Memorial's network in exile, shares content it produces or provides financial support.

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In response to the "extremist" ruling, Memorial's Human Rights Center, a branch providing legal aid to political prisoners, announced it would cease all direct operations within Russia to protect its staff and volunteers from the "repressive apparatus" of the state.

The EU's delegation to Russia called the Supreme Court decision a "politically motivated blow" that would nonetheless fail to erase the group's historical legacy.

Diplomats from France, Germany, Sweden and the Czech Republic reportedly attended the hearing in a show of support.

Memorial, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 alongside activists from Ukraine and Belarus, slammed the ruling as "unlawful," characterizing it as the final stage in the state's total suppression of independent civil society.

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