**Zarema Bagavutdinova**

On 21 May 2014, Zarema Ziyavtudinovna Bagavutdinova, member of the public organization “Pravozashchita”, (“Human Rights Defense” in Russian) was sentenced by the Buynaksk Municipal Court to 5 years in a general regime colony on the charge of committing a crime under Part 1 of Art. 205.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“Incitement and other involvement of individuals in committing a crime envisaged under Art. 208 of the Russian Criminal Code”). She has been in custody since 4 June 2013.

On 30 April 2013, gunmen fired at two vehicles that contained members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan, leaving three police officers dead and two wounded. The incident took place in the Dagestani city of Buynaksk.

On 4 June 2013, Zarema Bagavutdinova, member of the Dagestani regional non-profit organization “Pravozashchita,” was detained due to suspected involvement with the assailants. It is worth noting that in 2006, Bagavutdinova was sentenced to 4 years in prison for committing a crime under Part 2 of Art. 210 of the Russian Criminal Code (“Participation in a criminal group”).

On 2 August 2013 Bagavutdinova was charged under Part 5 of Art. 33 and Part 2 of Art. 208 of the Russian Criminal Code (“Participation in an armed formation that is not provided for by a federal law, in the form of collusion”). On 1 October the criminal case against her was severed, and on 14 November she was presented with the final version of the charges against her, under Part 1 of Art. 205.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (“Incitement and other involvement of individuals in committing a crime envisaged under Art. 208 of the Russian Criminal Code”).

The evidence against Bagavutdinova, obtained in the course of the investigation, is contradictory and is not sufficient to determine her guilt.

As proof of Bagavutdinova’s guilt, the prosecution used the fact that the accused, while in her capacity as an employee of the “Pravozashchita” organization, made comments to the press that were critical of the national security agencies. At the same time, no prohibited items or any proof of ties with the terrorists were found during the searches of Bagavutdinova’s home and work.

Notably, special operations were conducted in Buynaksk during the spring and summer of 2013, which were tied to the investigation of the attack that took place on 30 April 2013 and were aimed at finding, detaining, or eliminating the alleged terrorists. These anti-terrorist operations were plagued by numerous violations of legal norms. During this period, Bagavutdinova became one of the most important sources of information for the press and human rights organizations on the events taking place in Buynaksk. She revealed incidents of unlawful detention and abduction of suspects, gave voice to those detained and tortured, and highlighted violations of the Code of Criminal Procedure during the searches. In particular, she posted online videos of such cases as a way to raise awareness of what was taking place.

On 6 May 2013, security forces in Buynaksk blew up three houses that belonged to the families of alleged members of an illegal armed group. Officially, it was reported that the bomb squad had to detonate improvised explosive devices because it was impossible to transport them. Zarema Bagavutdinova became the first to refute the authorities’ version of these events, stating to the press that the bombings were carried out as acts of revenge and intimidation.

Initially, Bagavutdinova was detained as a suspect accused of committing a crime under Art. 317 (“Encroachment on the life of an officer of a law enforcement agency”), part 2 of Art. 222 (“Illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transportation, or bearing of firearms, its basic parts, ammunition, explosives, and explosive devices, committed by an organized group by preliminary agreement”), and part 1 of Art. 167 (“Willful destruction of private property, causing extensive damage”) of the Russian Criminal Code.

The official court statement on applying a measure of restraint by keeping Bagavutdinova in custody insists that her involvement is confirmed by the evidence gathered for the case, which includes witness statements as well as other documents. However, the court’s decision never referred to these documents. Furthermore, since Bagavutdinova was subsequently charged with committing a different crime, there is every reason to believe that the statements made in the course of the investigation and the court proceedings, which are contained in the documents related to the initiation of criminal proceedings and the imposing of the measure of restraint, were falsified.

At the same time, specific justifications of Bagavutdinova’s guilt that are set forth in the 6 June 2013 court decision granting the request to select detention as the measure of restraint, include arguments such as the accused being a member of a human rights organization that protects the rights and interests of those accused of breaking anti-terrorism law, and having family ties with those suspected of extremist and terrorist crimes.

It is important to note that membership as such in this kind of human rights organization is not a criminal offense, and activities within its framework are legal, even if the organization is sympathetic towards members of an illegal armed group and followers of the Islamic Salafi movement. Furthermore, relatives of people who have alleged ties with terrorist activities cannot be prosecuted.

The references made to Bagavutdinova’s human rights activities, religious beliefs and family ties in the course of the investigation and the court proceedings combined with the complete change in the course of the investigation of the description of the criminal offences attributed to her, give cause to view Bagavutdinova’s work and beliefs as the reason for the criminal persecution.

The prosecution justified incarcerating Bagavutdinova by falsifying the evidence of the alleged offence and did so solely because of the non-violent activity, aimed at protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms that was carried out objectively by the accused, even though she herself did not fully agree with the ideas of democracy and human rights. The persecution was carried out because of political motives, namely to forcibly terminate Bagavutdinova’s public activity.

The recognition of an individual as a political prisoner does not imply that the “Memorial” Center agrees with their views and statements, nor does it imply that it approves of their statements or actions.