

November 14, 2025

Statement

**On the Arbitrary Suspension of the
Lawyer Maria Bontsler's
Advocate Status**

<https://www.avocatrus.org>

Maria Bontsler is a well-known Russian lawyer (advocate) and human rights defender, a member of Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region. For a long period of time, lawyer Maria Bontsler has been subjected to persecution for her professional activities¹.

In 2022, lawyer Maria Bontsler was held administratively liable (Part 1 of Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation) for a statement in an open court session while presenting the defense position in the case of her client².

On May 28, 2025, lawyer Maria Bontsler was detained on charges of committing a crime under Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation («Cooperation on a confidential basis with a foreign state, international or foreign organization») and subjected to severe torturous treatment, and a search was conducted in her residence³.

On May 29, 2025, the Leningradsky District Court of Kaliningrad imposed on lawyer Maria Bontsler a measure of restraint in detention, the term of which has been repeatedly extended, despite serious illnesses that prevent her from being in detention centre. Since the moment of her arrest, lawyer Maria Bontsler has not been provided with proper medical assistance. In addition, lawyer Maria Bontsler is being coerced into slandering other lawyers as a condition of receiving a lesser punishment⁴.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, Mariana Katzarova⁵, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBHARI)⁶, the International Commission of Jurists⁷, the Interregional Public Organization of Lawyers and Jurists «Initiative 2018»⁸, International Association of Russian Advocates⁹, the International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger¹⁰,

¹ https://youtu.be/r_dcHzVZ0wE

² <https://fparf.ru/news/law-chambers/lichnoe-subektivnoe-mnenie/?ysclid=mhvd7ybgd3494525511> ;
<https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/10/25/harceles-emprisonnes-assassines-vers-une-rebellion-des-avocats-russes/> ;
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/young-russian-lawyers-step-up-defend-anti-war-protesters-2023-07-04/> ;
<https://pravo.ru/news/243611/?ysclid=mhvd7vdqnl504346288>

³ <https://www.cpi.org.fr/2025/06/20/novaya-gazeta-obvinenie-zasekretilo-delo-advokata-bonzler-no-izvestno-cto-brali-ee-te-na-kogo-ona-zhalovalas-zashhishhaya-svoih-klientov/>

⁴ <https://slovo-zashite.org/text/sledovatel-skazal-cto-budut-perekvalifitsirovat-moe-delo-na-gosizmenu-advokat-mariia-bontsler>

⁵ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/382> ; <https://www.ohchr.org/ru/press-releases/2025/07/russia-must-release-ill-lawyer-maria-bontsler-detained-retaliation-human>

⁶ <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBAHRI-UNHRC60-joint-letter-on-renewal-of-Special-Rapporteur-on-Russia-Sep25>

⁷ <https://www.icj.org/russian-federation-authorities-must-immediately-release-lawyer-maria-bontsler/>;
<https://www.ildubbio.news/cronache/liberate-lavvocata-bontsler-lappello-dellonu-contro-la-scure-di-mosca-dq58my9s>

⁸ <https://t.me/initiative2018/2116> , <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zayavlenie-pravleniya-mezhregionalnoy-obschestvennoy-organizatsii-advokatov-i-yuristov-initsiativa-2018-o-presledovanii-i-obyskah-u>

⁹ <https://www.avocatrus.org/post/требуем-прекратить-преследование-и-освободить-адвоката-марию-бонцлер> ;
<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zayavlenie-generalnogo-soveta-mezhdunarodnoy-assotsiatsii-rossiyskih-advokatov-trebuem-prekratit-presledovanie-i-osvobodit-advokata>

¹⁰ <https://protect-lawyers.org/en/case/maria-bontsler/>

have stated the unlawfulness and inadmissibility of the persecution of lawyer Maria Bontsler for carrying out her legal activities and the need for her immediate release.

The persecution of lawyer Maria Bontsler has received wide international media coverage¹¹.

Russian lawyers have called for all necessary measures to be taken to organize proper protection for lawyer Maria Bontsler. However, the Federal Chamber of Advocates is not taking any actions for her release, and¹², like its media¹³, is still silent even about the fact of her persecution. The Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region has acted in a similar manner¹⁴.

The UN Human Rights Committee, upon the application of the defenders of lawyer Maria Bontsler, undertook an immediate communication of the complaint, and also applied urgent measures aimed at ensuring her access to adequate medical care and treatment, bringing the conditions of her detention into compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, the Committee's urgent measures were aimed at considering alternatives to her detention.

On November 4, 2025, information appeared in the media¹⁵ that the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region, in the absence of a statement from lawyer Maria Bontsler, forcibly suspended her lawyer status, completely depriving her of the opportunity to carry out the defense of her clients, and her clients – of the right to use her legal assistance.

On November 7, 2025, Vice-President of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region Alexey Sozvariev, in an interview, confirmed the fact of suspension of lawyer Maria Bontsler's her advocate status by the decision of the Council of the Bar Association dated September 25, 2025. He indicated that the decision was made on the basis of the provisions of subparagraph 2 of paragraph 1 of Article 16 of the Federal Law dated May 31, 2002 No. 63-FZ «On Advocacy and the Legal Profession in the Russian Federation». According to this subparagraph, the lawyer's (advocate's) status is suspended on the basis of the inability to perform professional duties for more than six months¹⁶.

Meanwhile, it follows from the interview that the inability of lawyer Maria Bontsler to perform her professional duties was not confirmed by actual circumstances and was not verified by the Council of the Bar Association, and the decision itself was made before the expiration of the six-month period from the moment of her arrest (3 months and 28 days have passed).

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Havana, Cuba, August 27 - September 7, 1990), provide in Articles 10 and 16 that «Governments, professional associations of lawyers and educational institutions shall ensure that there is no discrimination against a person with respect to entry into or continued practice within the legal profession on the grounds of race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, economic or other status, except that a requirement, that a lawyer must be a national of the country concerned, shall not be considered discriminatory. ...

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics»¹⁷.

¹¹ <https://www.lrwc.org/seismic-decline-in-russias-human-rights-situation-joint-statement-to-un-human-rights-council/>; <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/rusia/povestea-bmw-ului-din-kaliningrad-avocata-din-rusia-care-refuza-sa-cedeze-in-fata-lui-putin-doar-o-persoana-nebuna-nu-s-ar-teme-3361009>; <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/standing-up-to-putins-regime-the-russian-lawyer-who-refuses-to-back-down-a-b549a535-7dfe-4e29-bd84-9c30206baacc> ; <https://defendlawyers.wordpress.com/2025/05/29/russia-lawyers-defending-chronically-ill-political-prisoner-undergo-searches-in-kaliningrad/> ; <https://www.rightsinrussia.org/nikitinsky-124/> ; <https://www.devdiscourse.com/article/law-order/3498955-un-condemns-russias-arrest-of-lawyer-maria-bontsler-as-political-repression-escalates>

¹² <https://fparf.ru/>

¹³ <https://www.advgazeta.ru/>

¹⁴ <https://palatakdr.ru/index.php>

¹⁵ <https://t.me/endoflaw/1636>

¹⁶ <https://t.me/endoflaw/1656>

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-role-lawyers>

The implementation of measures to persecute and intimidate lawyers strikes at the very heart of the human rights protection system¹⁸. In accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Federal Law dated May 31, 2002 No. 63-FZ «On Advocacy and the Legal Profession in the Russian Federation», «interference in advocacy activities carried out in accordance with the law, or obstruction of such activities in any way is prohibited»¹⁹. At the same time, the law does not establish a prohibition on a lawyer providing qualified legal assistance to clients while the lawyer is in places of forced detention.

From this, in relation to the activities of lawyer Maria Bontsler, it follows that she must have the right to freely defend the interests of clients without interference from authorities and the bar association and regardless of the conditions and place of her location, the right to attorney-client privilege and protection from unfounded law enforcement measures, the ability to work without undue pressure or the threat of losing her advocate status due to her own defensive position.

The decision of the Council of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region on the forced suspension of the lawyer's Maria Bontsler advocate status is not just a mistake. This is an act that demonstratively tramples on the above fundamental principles of Russian legislation on the bar, international standards of professional independence, and the very essence of bar self-governance, which is intended to protect its members, not to facilitate their persecution.

The actions of the Council of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region are not only illegal but also deeply immoral, as they represent an act of corporate betrayal. The Bar Association, by virtue of its purpose, is obliged to ensure that lawyers «are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference», and in the situation with the criminal prosecution of lawyer Maria Bontsler, it is precisely the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region that was obliged to act as the main defender and guarantor of compliance with her rights.

Instead, the Council of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region solidarizes with the accusations and, instead of defending a colleague, hastens to get rid of the «problematic» lawyer, thereby publicly distancing itself from her and unequivocally supporting her persecution. By suspending the lawyer's Maria Bontsler advocate status precisely because of her being in detention, the Council, disregarding the presumption of innocence and the lawyer's right to freely carry out professional activities, demonstrates an anti-lawyer interpretation and application of the law's provisions, and thereby demonstrates the transformation of the bar association into a repressive appendage of state bodies, used to suppress lawyers engaged in «sensitive» cases.

The statement by the Vice-President of the Bar association that the suspension of lawyer's Maria Bontsler advocate status is allegedly a «light» decision, made to relieve her of taxes and mandatory contributions for the maintenance of the bar association and the Federal Chamber of Advocates, is the height of cynicism. This is a clumsy attempt to disguise arbitrariness with feigned «care».

Based on the above, the General Council of the International Association of Russian Advocates demands:

1. From the Council of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region: immediately cancel the illegal decision on the suspension of lawyer's Maria Bontsler advocate status and offer her public apologies for the actions taken on the arbitrary suspension of her advocate status.
2. From the Federal Chamber of Advocates: provide a principled legal and ethical assessment of the actions of the leadership of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region, which discredits the Russian bar, and use its powers to restore legality.
3. From the Federal Chamber of Advocates and the Council of the Bar Association of the Kaliningrad Region - to cover in the media and on the organizations' websites on the Internet the fact of the persecution of lawyer Maria Bontsler for carrying out professional activities and to take all measures dependent on them for her immediate release.

General Council of the International Association of Russian Advocates

¹⁸ <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=7&documentId=153074&ysclid=mhp77y5itj586705679>

¹⁹ https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_36945/de49fc642b87ccc764af4b845b3bd509a9094bdd/