

**To: Vladimir V. Putin**  
**President of the Russian Federation**

cc: Dmitry A. Medvedev, Prime Minister  
Aleksandr V. Konovalov, Minister of Justice

Dear Mr President,

I am writing to request that you encourage Russia's Ministry of Justice to rescind its decision to force the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) to cease activity for six months. The decision to suspend RAIPON is not only an unjust punishment for RAIPON's supposed transgression; it will also severely hinder the ability of Russians to exercise their constitutional rights both at home and abroad.

This enforced closure of RAIPON for minor bureaucratic reasons is a gross misuse of Russian law and should be reversed immediately so that RAIPON can adapt its organizational structure without halting its activity. The Ministry of Justice justifies RAIPON's suspension by stating that the organizations' regional affiliates are missing from RAIPON's charter, in violation of Russian law. RAIPON has been in existence for more than 20 years, and Russia's constitution was only ratified in 1994. RAIPON's charter has been in place since 1990, with a consistent method for listing affiliates and, in that time, the Ministry of Justice has conducted two thorough federal reviews – neither of which found that RAIPON was in violation of the constitution. This sudden forced suspension of RAIPON's activities is absurdly disproportionate given the organization's long history of compliance, especially since RAIPON's leadership has tried in good faith to rectify this administrative violation since receiving notice in 2010. The Ministry of Justice, however, refused to accept the revised charter submitted in 2011 or to work with RAIPON to resolve this matter. The organization's failure to resolve the problem despite its greatest efforts is indicative of the Ministry's lack of support. We therefore urge you to appeal to the Ministry of Justice to resolve this bureaucratic matter without hindering RAIPON's important work.

Halting RAIPON's work will severely limit the ability of Russia's indigenous peoples to assert their constitutional rights, both within Russia and internationally. In addition to providing legal and moral assistance to the thousands of indigenous peoples in Russia, RAIPON advises local and federal agencies on the best policies for working with indigenous communities and is an active participant in the All-Russia People's Front. If the organization has to close, it will be the end of an important force working for inter-ethnic cooperation throughout Russia.

RAIPON also represents indigenous Russians in several international and multinational governance bodies. By disbanding RAIPON, the Ministry of Justice has significantly decreased Russia's influence in such fora as the Arctic Council, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Environment Programme. It is in the interests of the Russian government to ensure that Russia's citizens are fully represented in these organizations, and the Ministry of Justice should therefore seek to resolve any administrative errors in RAIPON's functioning without disrupting the organization's representation internationally.

As President of the Russian Federation, it is your duty to protect your citizens. Closing RAIPON will affect thousands of indigenous Russians who rely on the organization for legal advice, legislative assistance and international representation. For this reason, I urge you to take immediate steps to encourage the Ministry of Justice to reinstate RAIPON and help bring its activities into line with the Russian Constitution.