

# Exiled human rights lawyer Ivan Pavlov launches new legal group to take on Russia's treason and espionage cases

Exiled human rights lawyer Ivan Pavlov has launched a new legal group that specializes in defending those accused of treason and espionage in Russia. Pavlov, who fled abroad to escape criminal charges in September, previously led Team 29 — a similar human rights initiative that tackled some of Russia's most challenging political prosecutions. The group disbanded in July 2021, to protect its members and supporters from persecution. Pavlov's new project, dubbed "Pervy Otdel" (which translates as "First Department" or "Department One") also aims to take on cases that are handled "behind closed doors" and will function in cooperation with colleagues working "on the ground" in Russia.

Prominent human rights lawyer Ivan Pavlov, who fled Russia citing persecution in September, has established a new legal group called "Pervy Otdel" (Department One).

"The first department [*pervy otdel*] of the FSB Investigative Directorate investigates criminal cases of treason and espionage. The first department of the courts oversees legal proceedings for such cases. The first department of state institutions handle the classification of documents and the protection of state secrets. Often, behind the closed doors of the offices in first departments, legal arbitrariness is taking place. Our Pervy Otdel will fight for the employees of all the country's first departments to comply with the law, so that your rights aren't violated by them," Pavlov [wrote](#) on Telegram on Monday, December 20.

In a [statement](#) posted on its new Telegram channel (deptone), Pervy Otdel is described as an open community of lawyers and human rights activists that deal with cases "that are examined behind closed doors." This includes cases opened on charges of treason, espionage, and the illegal receipt and disclosure of state secrets, among others.

"Our project will defend those caught up in criminal cases connected to state security, collect and analyze all available information about closed proceedings, make public cases connected to treason, state secrets, and extremism in those frequent cases where they are politically motivated or serve only one goal — to improve conviction rate statistics and provide further awards, titles, and promotions," Pavlov explained.

In addition to taking on criminal cases, lawyers from Pervy Otdel are prepared to defend civil and administrative cases — for example, representing those who are trying to obtain information about relatives who were victims of Soviet-era repressions or other information that the authorities are required to hand over by law.

Ivan Pavlov is a prominent human rights lawyer and the former head of Team 29, a legal group he established in 2014. Team 29's members took on some of Russia's toughest and most high-profile criminal cases, including defending Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation during the court case that saw it [outlawed](#) as an "extremist organization," and representing jailed former journalist [Ivan Safronov](#), who is awaiting trial for treason.

In April 2021, Pavlov was charged with leaking classified trial data from the Safronov case. Courts prohibited him from using the Internet and speaking to his own clients and many of his own colleagues.

## backstory

- [No soldiers but ready for battle](#) For years, lawyers at Team 29 have taken on some of Russia's most hopeless human rights cases. Now federal charges against the group's leader are testing the team's resolve.
- [Human rights law in Russia](#)

Three months later, in July 2021, Team 29 [announced](#) it was disbanding, after the Russian Attorney General's Office ordered local Internet service providers to start blocking the legal group's website.

Facing up to three months in jail and disbarment, Pavlov [fled Russia](#) in September, saying that the pre-trial restrictions had made his work "impossible." The Russian authorities put Pavlov on a [wanted list](#) in October and [blacklisted](#) him as a "foreign agent" in November.

Though established abroad, Pervy Otdel plans to work jointly with lawyers and human rights activists still in Russia. "We handled cases important to the security forces too loudly and they forced us to leave. Our colleagues support us in the Russian Federation — 'on the ground.' We can't always say their names: cooperation with us is fraught with repression. But believe us, our joint work gets results," Pervy Otdel wrote on Telegram.