

Press Release

UN/Russia

UN Human Rights Committee Expresses Strong Criticism over Russia's Human Rights Record

Moscow, Geneva, 12 November 2009: In its concluding observations on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the Russian Federation since 2002, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed its deep concern over the deteriorating situation of civil and political rights in Russia and urged the Russian authorities to comply with their commitments under international law.

The Committee expressed its particular concern at the alarming incidence of threats, violent assaults and murders of journalists and human rights defenders, in particular in the North Caucasus, and urged Russia to take immediate action to provide for the effective protection of journalists and human rights defenders.

"The Human Rights Committee's call for effective and full investigation of the murders of Anna Politkovskaia, Natalia Estemirova and other journalists and human rights defenders is a strong reminder for Russia. Russian authorities must now go beyond declarations of good will and ensure that credible investigations are launched and that murderers are brought to justice," said FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen.

Furthermore, the UN Human Rights Committee urged Russia to adopt, among others, the following measures to end human rights violations and amend relevant laws and practices:

- **put an end to massive human rights violations**, including enforced disappearances, extra judicial killings and torture instigated by state agents, committed in Chechnya and other parts of the **North Caucasus**, ensure prompt and impartial investigations of such crimes, prosecute perpetrators and grant effective remedies to the victims;
- **adopt a narrower definition of terrorism** in the Federal Law on Counteracting Terrorism in accordance with human rights norms;
- ensure that **journalists can perform their profession** without fear of being prosecuted for criticizing government policy or government officials, amend its Criminal Code to reflect the principle that **public figures should tolerate a greater degree of criticism** than ordinary citizens, **de-criminalise defamation**, and **provide redress to journalists and human rights activists** subjected to imprisonment;
- amend the 2006 Non-Profit Organizations Act in order to ensure that any **restriction on the activities of NGOs** is compatible with the provisions of the Covenant, and refrain from adopting any policy measures that restrict the ability of NGOs to operate freely and effectively;
- amend the relevant legal provisions in order to **ensure full independence of the judiciary** from the executive branch of government and refrain from taking any measures that constitute **harassment of lawyers** and unnecessarily interfere with their defence of clients;
- revise the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity to **make the definition of "extremist activity" more precise** so as to exclude any possibility of arbitrary application;
- improve application of laws punishing **racially motivated crimes**;

- take necessary measures to regularise status of **stateless persons** on its territory by granting them a **right to permanent residence** and the possibility to acquire **Russian citizenship**;
- amend the Criminal Code in order to **criminalize torture** as such, ensure that all alleged cases of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officials are promptly investigated, that those found guilty are punished and that compensation is provided to the victims;
- ensure that no individual who is **extradited** or subjected to **informal transfers** to other countries is **exposed to the danger of torture**.

“Russian NGOs strongly support recommendations of the UN Committee and see them as an excellent opportunity for the Russian government to work together with the UN and non-governmental organisations in the next five years to take serious measures for the reversal of the negative trend in the implementation of human rights and ensuring that rule of law prevails and impunity for human rights abuse is brought to an end” said CDDHR President Yuri Dzhibladze.

FIDH and its Russian partners, which had provided the Human Rights Committee with alternative reports, call on the Russian Government not to ignore the criticism and recommendations made by the UN Committee and other international authorities and to use them as a basis for necessary changes in legislation and practices.

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