

## **Press Release**

### **Russia**

#### **Grief and anger at FIDH following the kidnapping and assassination of Natalia Estemirova**

**Paris, July 16, 2009** – Yesterday, around 8.30 am, in Grozny, the defender working for the Memorial Human Rights Centre, Natalia Estemirova, was kidnapped as she was leaving her home. She was found dead a few hours later in Ingushetia with two gunshot wounds, in head and chest. This was purely and simply an execution, aimed at silencing one of the bravest figures in the field of the defence of Human Rights in Chechnya, aiming also without a doubt at deterring others from continuing their work documenting Human Rights violations in Chechnya and assisting victims and their families.

Natalia Estemirova had been working for "Memorial" since 2000. In the autumn of 2007, FIDH had invited this partner of long standing to Paris for the commemoration of the first anniversary of the assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, with whom she had been very close. She was in fact the first person to receive the Anna Politkovskaya award.

For many years and up to the very last Natalia Estemirova worked on disappearances and arbitrary executions committed by Chechen forces, denouncing also the multiple pressures put on the families of independence fighters, whose homes were burnt down. She was one of the few persons to contradict, with supporting evidence and great honesty, the triumphant announcements by the Chechnyan and Russian authorities on the reconstruction and the "pacification" of the Republic.

"With Natalia, FIDH has lost a partner and a companion of many years. She was a woman of inflexible courage and determination", declared Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President. Alongside Memorial, FIDH will continue to defend Human Rights in North-Caucasus and to support all Russian and Chechen human rights defenders".

FIDH calls on

- the Chechen and Russian authorities to take all necessary steps to identify and bring to justice the authors of her kidnapping and assassination, and those who commissioned the crime,
- the French and European authorities to make an official request to the Russian government to provide information on the case.

For further information, see the Press release by the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders (FIDH/OMCT):

<http://www.fidh.org/Murder-of-another-major-human>

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