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Public Statement

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Russian Federation: Amnesty International calls for guilty verdict against Stanislav Dmitrievskii to be overturned

Amnesty International is deeply disappointed by today's conviction of human rights defender Stanislav Dmitrievskii on "race hate" charges, for publishing non-violent articles by Chechen separatist leaders.

Amnesty International considers that the conviction of Stanislav Dmitrievskii is a blow to independent civil society in Russia and will have a stifling effect on the right to freedom of expression. Stanislav Dmitrievskii has been convicted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and should not have faced trial in the first place. Amnesty International considers that the conviction should be quashed.

The Sovietskii district court in Nizhnii Novgorod imposed a two-year suspended sentence and a four-year probationary period on Stanislav Dmitrievskii. During this four-year period, Stanislav Dmitrievskii will have to inform the authorities as to any change of residence or travel plans, and will have to report regularly to the local authorities. Any violation of these conditions or a further criminal conviction could result in him being imprisoned for two years.

Following the verdict, Stanislav Dmitrievskii thanked Amnesty International for the organization's support and expressed his determination to challenge the court's decision through the Russian courts and if necessary at the European Court of Human Rights. Reportedly, the prosecution also intends to appeal the verdict. Amnesty International will continue to campaign for justice for Stanislav Dmitrievskii and will monitor closely the progress of the case.

Background

Stanislav Dmitrievskii is Executive Director of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) and editor-in-chief of the *Pravo-zashchita* newspaper (Rights defence, a human rights-oriented newspaper), which is published jointly by RCFS and another Nizhnii Novgorod-based human rights organization. Amnesty International is concerned that the criminal prosecution is a violation of his right to freedom of expression, and seems to be part of a campaign of harassment aimed at closing down the work of the RCFS.

Stanislav Dmitrievskii was convicted for publishing in the April-May 2004 edition of *Pravo-zashchita* an appeal by the late Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov to the European Parliament calling for international recognition of the current Chechen conflict as "an act of genocide by the Russian government against the Chechen people", and an appeal in the March 2004 edition of *Pravo-zashchita* by Aslan Maskhadov's envoy Akhmed Zakaev to the Russian people not to re-elect President Vladimir Putin. He was convicted under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code which criminalizes:

"...incitement of hatred or enmity, and likewise demeaning human dignity with regard to indicia of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude towards religion, and likewise affiliation to any social group, committed publicly or with the use of the mass media... and with the use of his professional position."

However, Amnesty International considers that the two articles published do not contain any incitement to hatred or enmity, or any form of violence.

Amnesty International is concerned that such prosecutions have a chilling effect on freedom of expression in Russia and in this case has been part of a wider campaign against the RCFS. For several months, Amnesty International has expressed its concern at an apparent campaign of harassment and prosecution aimed at members of the RCFS, reportedly in response to the organization's work on human rights.

As well as the criminal prosecution of Stanislav Dmitrievskii, the organization has simultaneously been subjected to legal action by the tax authorities and by the registration department of the Ministry of Justice. At the same time, both Stanislav Dmitrievskii and another staff member, Oksana Chelysheva, have been the subject of threatening leaflets which have been distributed this year in Nizhnii Novgorod, where the organization is based. Oksana Chelysheva is deputy Executive Director of the RCFS, editor of the Russian Chechen Information Agency, and editor of the *Pravo-zashchita* newspaper. The leaflets have accused the human rights defenders of being "traitors" and supporters of "terrorists". Police investigations into the leaflets have been opened but no one responsible has yet been identified.