

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

## News Flash

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### **Russian Federation: Amnesty International delivers petitions to President Vladimir Putin**

A petition with more than 16 000 signatures collected by Amnesty International's worldwide membership was delivered today to the Administration of President Putin. The petition - designed as a symbolic passport - urged President Putin to address the plight of hundreds of thousands of former Soviet citizens in Russia who are being denied their legal right to obtain Russian citizenship and/or permanent residency rights.

"When former Soviet passports expire on 31 December 2003, these people will be left stateless and may face the threat of deportation," Amnesty International said.

A few last signatures were collected and added to the eight transparent bags full of the "Russian passport" petitions-cards in the centre of Moscow. The action attracted much of media attention. The signed petitions-cards were received by an official at the Administration who promised to pass them to the President.

"Those denied citizenship and permanent registration in the Russian Federation are effectively denied a whole range of basic rights including freedom of movement and equality before the law. Their 'statelessness' also means they cannot get pensions, child benefits, higher education, register house or vehicle purchases, marriages or deaths. They are frequently stopped and questioned by police on the pretext of checking their identity documentation, and obstructed in their work or going about their daily business," Sergei Nikitin, Director of Amnesty International's Russian Resource Centre said.

The handover of the petition came at the end of the 100-day bus tour of a number of Central and East European countries that Amnesty International Switzerland launched in July as part of the organization's worldwide campaign on human rights in the Russian Federation. During the tour the bus covered more than 10,000 kilometres and crossed the boundaries of 14 European countries. Members of Amnesty International used the tour stops to inform the public about Amnesty International's activities and to raise the organization's main concerns on human rights abuses in the Russian Federation, many of which are committed with impunity.

#### **Background**

Earlier this year Amnesty International published its report *'Dokumenty!' Discrimination on grounds of race in the Russian Federation* where it highlighted the plight of citizens of the former Soviet Union who were "permanently residing" in the Russian Federation when the Citizenship Law came into force (on 6 February 1992), and who had not declined Russian citizenship. Such people are by law Russian citizens. However, many former Soviet citizens, including a number of ethnic or national minority groups who were

forced to move to what became the Russian Federation prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, have been denied their legal right to citizenship despite legislation which clearly entitles them to it.

The most notable example are the Meskhetians, a largely Muslim group who were forcibly relocated from southwest Georgia in 1944 by the former Soviet regime. Many Meskhetians who had been transported to Uzbekistan were subsequently forced to flee to Russia in 1989 after violent attacks on them. There are estimated to be between 50,000 and 70,000 Meskhetians living in the Russian Federation. Most have been able to affirm their right to citizenship. However, the vast majority of the 13,000 to 16,000 Meskhetians living in Krasnodar Territory continue to be denied their legal rights, including their right to citizenship, because of discriminatory legislation and practices in the Territory.

In agreement with the current Law on Foreigners, persons who do not have documentation to prove that they are legally and permanently residing in Russia are to receive migration cards which limit the period of stay to three months. After the three-month period, those who have not obtained temporary residence permits can, by law, be deported.

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