

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 46/053/2005 (Public)  
News Service No: 306  
15 November 2005

### **Executive Director of Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, Stanislav Dmitrievskii, possible prisoner of conscience**

Stanislav Dmitrievskii is facing up to five years' imprisonment for his decision to publish articles written by a former Chechen separatist leader and his envoy. 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. If imprisoned on these charges, Amnesty International would consider Stanislav Dmitrievskii to be a prisoner of conscience. Amnesty International is calling for the charges to be dropped. The first hearing of the merits of the case is on 16 November.

The subject of the criminal investigation is an appeal, published in the April-May 2004 edition of *Pravo-zashchita*, 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. Stanislav Dmitrievskii faces charges 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."*

Amnesty International considers that the two articles published do not contain any incitement to hatred or enmity, or any form of violence. The articles are critical of Russian government policy rather than expressing any criticism of ethnic Russians, and contain calls for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The RCFS's general political stance, the editorial position of *Pravo-zashchita* and the stated personal conviction of Stanislav Dmitrievskii, is one of complete rejection of violent means as a way of solving the Chechen conflict. This is evident from the RCFS's founding declaration, the nature of the articles published in *Pravo-zashchita*, and numerous statements made by Stanislav Dmitrievskii. Moreover, Stanislav Dmitrievskii told Amnesty International that he had had several motivations for publishing the articles in question: that the articles contained a clear public interest, in that Russian citizens have a right to know the opinion of the other side to the conflict which is not to be found in mainstream media; that both articles concerned a call for peaceful negotiations to end the conflict; and that the articles did not contain any call to violence.

A British lawyer who had been due to observe the trial proceedings in Nizhnii Novgorod was denied entry

to the Russian Federation on 15 November. Bill Bowring, a barrister and professor of human rights and international law at the London Metropolitan University, was reportedly held without explanation by border officials for six hours at Moscow's Sheremetievo-2 airport before being put on an airplane back to the UK. He was in possession of a valid multiple-entry visa and carried letters of accreditation as a trial observer from Frontline Defenders, a non-governmental organization that campaigns on behalf of human rights defenders at risk, and the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales.

The RCFS is a non-governmental organization that monitors human rights violations in Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus. Staff and volunteers in Nizhnii Novgorod and the North Caucasus produce daily press releases on "disappearances" and other serious human rights violations which are disseminated by the organization's project, the Russian Chechen Information Agency. The RCFS also publishes the *Pravo-zashchita* newspaper jointly with the Nizhnii Novgorod Human Rights Society and undertakes humanitarian initiatives for individuals affected by the conflict in the North Caucasus, for example organizing medical assistance and holiday breaks in other parts of the Russian Federation for children affected by the conflict.

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 investigation into Stanislav Dmitrievskii, the organization is simultaneously undergoing legal action by the tax authorities and 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.