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Russian Federation: Police should not detain or ill-treat peaceful protesters

Amnesty International is calling on the Russian Government and law enforcement authorities to ensure that no incidents of ill-treatment or detention of peaceful demonstrators occur during today's all-Russia day of protest action.

The organization is seeking assurances from the authorities that no one will be ill-treated or imprisoned by the police simply for their political beliefs and for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly. Should any peaceful demonstrators be detained by the police, Amnesty International will consider them prisoners of conscience.

"Ill-treatment by law enforcement officials is totally unacceptable," Amnesty International said today. "Given the widespread practice of torture and harsh-treatment in detention in the Russian Federation, we fear that during the national protest today incidents of beatings of peaceful demonstrators by the police are possible."

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a total of 11,000 policemen and 4,000 members of the Internal Troops forces have been employed to maintain law and order on the streets of Moscow alone during the protests.

Amnesty International welcomes the steps taken by the Russian authorities to ensure the peaceful outcome of the demonstrations. These included meetings last week between the Minister of Internal Affairs, Sergey Stepashin, and senior law enforcement officials in the regions. Mr Stepashin was quoted as saying that "*rudeness and tactlessness towards those participating in the action are impermissible; otherwise, we will ourselves push citizens into responding with illegal behaviour, which could turn into mass unrest*".

However, Amnesty International is concerned about reports that the police will take a number of preventive measures against demonstrators who seem suspicious from the official point of view.

The organization is urging the authorities to inform all law enforcement officials, assigned to ensure law and order during the protests, that torture and ill-treatment are prohibited in any circumstances under the provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Russian Federation is a party.

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