

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

5 October 2012

AI Index: EUR 46/038/2012

Russian authorities must investigate threats received by a prominent Russian human rights defender

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the latest reported incidents of harassment against of a prominent Russian human rights defender, and is calling on the Russian authorities to establish and bring to justice those who stand behind them.

Tatiana Lokshina, Deputy Director of Human Rights Watch's Moscow office, reports that, in the course of several days, she was the target of recurring anonymous threats. Each day, several text messages were delivered to her mobile which contained direct and implicit threats to her and her unborn baby, and made references to her pregnancy and many other personal details that would only be known to family members and close friends, or could be collected in the course of sophisticated covert surveillance. The senders of the messages also made references to Islam and activities of armed groups, which indicated that these threats were related to Tatiana Lokshina's professional activities.

Tatiana Lokshina is one of the leading human rights experts on the North Caucasus, and an outspoken critic of human rights violations in the region and wider Russia. She has been a prominent member of Russia's human rights community for many years. Prior to joining Human Rights Watch in January 2008, she headed a Moscow-based human rights think-tank Demos. The threats made against Tatiana Lokshina have clearly been intended to intimidate a prominent Russian human rights activist, and obstruct her work and the work of Human Rights Watch.

The threats against Tatiana Lokshina come amidst other recent instances of harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists in the Russian Federation, and the continuing crackdown on the freedom of expression in the country. Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern in recent months regarding the recurring incidents of harassment and intimidation which human rights organisations in Russia face, including in its publication *Beaten up for speaking out: Attacks on human rights defenders in the Russian Federation* (AI Index 46/038/2011).¹ The Russian authorities have regularly failed to investigate such attacks effectively and bring their perpetrators to justice.

The threats against Tatiana Lokshina also come in the context of what appears to be an ongoing crackdown on the freedoms of expression and assembly in the Russian Federation. In the months which followed the inauguration of Vladimir Putin as Russia's newly elected President, a number of legislative changes have been introduced which impose new restrictions on these freedoms. These include tighter restrictions on public demonstrations and increased fines for those who fail to observe them, the re-criminalization of libel, and the imposition of a legal obligation on NGOs to register as 'organizations performing the functions of foreign agents' if they receive foreign funding and engage in very broadly defined 'political activities'. In recent days, the State Duma has been considering two draft laws, one of which introduces broader, and vaguer, definitions of state treason and espionage, and another which criminalizes blasphemy.

Amnesty International joins Human Rights Watch in calling on the Russian authorities to investigate, promptly, effectively and impartially, the threats made against Tatiana Lokshina, as well as all other Russian human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists who have suffered attacks and harassment in Russia in recent years, and to identify and bring their perpetrators to justice.

¹ Available at <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/038/2011/en>.

Background

Human rights activists in Russia regularly face pressure and harassment, particularly those working in, or on, the North Caucasus. Thus, years after the abduction and killing in July 2009 of a prominent human rights activist from the North Caucasus, Natalia Estemirova, no-one has brought to justice. In March 2012, a member of human rights NGO Mashr, in Ingushetia, was arrested and allegedly subjected to torture and other ill-treatment by police.² Prior to this, members of Mashr had reported incidents of pressure against other members of staff raising concern for their safety.

Members of the Inter-Regional Committee against Torture, an NGO based in Nizhni Novgorod which has established permanent presence in Gorzny, Chechnya, have been repeatedly subjected to pressure and intimidation, both in Chechnya and elsewhere in Russia, in connection with their human rights work, including by anonymous individuals and law enforcement officials.³ In June 2012, three members of the Committee working in Chechnya were summoned to a meeting during which the Head of the Republic Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly accused them of “hating the Chechen people”. On 7 July, the Committee’s Chair Igor Kalyapin was summoned for questioning by an investigator from Yessentuki on the pretext that he had revealed confidential information pertaining to some criminal investigations in Chechnya. In September 2012, several Amnesty International activists from Russia who had written to the Russian authorities to express their concern about this and earlier attempts to have criminal proceedings opened against Igor Kalyapin in connection with his work in the North Caucasus⁴, were themselves summoned to the Investigative Committee and requested to give explanations. Amnesty International has also learnt that some Russian journalists who have published articles based on information provided by Igor Kalyapin about human rights violations by law enforcement officials in Chechnya and the lack of effective investigation into these violations and the relevant obstacles, have also been summoned for questioning by officials from either the Investigative Committee or the Federal Security Service (FSB) and asked questions virtually identical to those which the summoned Amnesty International activists had to answer.

According to the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organisations of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), human rights defenders play an important role in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in doing so they have the right to “study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”, including by freely publishing and disseminating their views to others. This also includes “the right to criticise government bodies and agencies...; the right to provide legal assistance or other advice and assistance in defence of human rights”. According to the same document, “[t]he State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”

End/

² See Amnesty International, “Russian Federation: A staff member of Ingushetian human rights NGO Mashr briefly ‘disappeared’; others facing growing pressure” (AI Index: EUR 46/009/2012), available at <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/009/2012/en>.

³ See Amnesty International, “Human rights defenders working in Chechnya subjected to further threats and harassment” (AI Index: EUR 46/034/2011), available at: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/034/2011/en>.

⁴ See Urgent Action on harassment of Igor Kalyapin, AI Index: EUR 46/028/2012, available at: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/028/2012/en>.