

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **RUSSIAN FEDERATION: FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AT IMMINENT RISK**

Amnesty International is gravely concerned over the continuing encroachment on the right to the freedom of association in the Russian Federation as the Federal Law "On Introducing Changes to Certain Pieces of Legislation of the Russian Federation as Regards Regulation of Activities of Non-Commercial Organizations Performing the Functions of Foreign Agents" comes into effect on 21 November 2012.

The law imposes a legal obligation on Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which receive foreign aid in any form and engage in what the law loosely defines as political activities to register as "organizations performing the functions of foreign agents", and makes provisions for hefty fines and other severe administrative penalties, as well as criminal prosecution, including imprisonment, for failure to obey to this requirement.

In July, Amnesty International already expressed its concern about this piece of legislation, then still a draft bill, and emphasized, amongst other things, that it would place a significant financial and administrative burden on independent Russian civil society organizations, and stressed that the law appeared to seek to discredit such organizations in the eyes of Russia's general public because the wording "foreign agent" ("*inostrannyi agent*") carries negative connotations in Russian and is often used as synonymous with spying.<sup>i</sup>

The enactment of this law will stifle civil society development in Russia and is likely to be used to silence critical voices, which often depend on external funding to ensure their independence of the Russian authorities.

A number of prominent Russian human rights and other NGOs have indicated that they would refuse to register as "foreign agents" and risk suspension of their activities and other consequences, rather than so endorsing this deliberately provocative misrepresentation of their objectives and of the nature of their activities.

Amnesty International is urging the Russian authorities to immediately rescind this law and refrain from any steps amounting to further encroachment on the right to the freedom of association and stifling of civil society in the Russian Federation.

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<sup>i</sup> Amnesty Internatinoal, "Russian Federation: Freedom of association under a new attack", Public Statement, 13 July 2012 (Index: EUR 46/029/2012)