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## **Moscow authorities refuse to allow an Amnesty International event**

The Moscow authorities' refusal to allow a small Amnesty International event to highlight Russia's appalling human rights record ahead of the Sochi Olympics demonstrates the lack of tolerance for freedom of expression in Russia today.

On 7 October, as the Olympic torch arrives in Moscow, Amnesty International is launching a worldwide campaign to highlight problems with freedom of expression in Russia which are in direct conflict with the Olympic spirit.

A small event was proposed in Moscow's Pushkin Square, in solidarity with other Amnesty International events and, as required by Russian law the authorities were notified of plans to hold the 15-strong picket. Three alternative locations were also proposed by the human rights organization.

The Moscow authorities' written reply stated that Pushkin Square is "unsuitable for a public event" because "it would be impossible ... to provide safety" for the event. They failed to explain why the safety of 15 people could not be ensured. They also failed to consider the three alternative locations for Amnesty International's picket.

The Russian authorities suggested that the action be held in a remote and quiet park in Khamovniki district.

"Why have the authorities failed even to consider our proposed alternative sites? Presumably, the answer to this question lies in the actual aims of the picket which was intended to highlight the authorities' intolerance of dissent," said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

"It is true that the Moscow authorities have complied with the law but their suggestion that the picket should be held in one of Moscow's least frequented parks reflects the state of freedom of expression and assembly in Russia today."

"We are disappointed by the authorities' response, and we do not accept their explanation for the refusal. Our activists plan to appeal this decision."