

AI Index: PRE 01/606/2011
05 December 2011

Hundreds held in Russian election protests

The Russian authorities must release all of the peaceful protesters detained over the weekend amid allegations of fraud in Sunday's parliamentary elections, Amnesty International said today.

More than 300 opposition activists and bystanders were reportedly arrested by police in cities across Russia amid protests against alleged manipulation of votes by presidential candidate Vladimir Putin's United Russia party.

"These disgraceful detentions highlight once again the failure of the Russian government to respect its citizens' rights to freedom of expression and assembly," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

"The vast majority of those arrested since Sunday have sought merely to peacefully express their protest. They are prisoners of conscience and they must be released immediately."

Across Russia police moved swiftly to pre-empt and disperse potential protests. In Moscow, opposition parties called for demonstrations against election fraud on Red Square and Triumfalnaya Square. Police responded by detaining potential demonstrators and onlookers.

Several well known opposition activists were detained at home or on their way to demonstrations, with some being sentenced to up to 10 days of administrative detention.

"Our staff in Moscow watched as several peaceful people were whisked off the street by police without any provocation," said Nicola Duckworth.

"Others didn't even make it to the protests and were instead seized pre-emptively."

Among the opposition politicians detained is Andrei Gorin from the Other Russia, who was reportedly beaten and sentenced to 10 days' administrative detention.

Left Front activist Sergey Udaltsov was arrested by plain clothes police officers on his way to a demonstration and has been sentenced to five days' administrative detention.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the harassment of Golos, an independent election monitoring NGO.

Golos head Lilya Shibanova was detained at Moscow airport and her computer was confiscated, with police claiming its software may pose a security risk.

The NGO was fined for allegedly violating its obligations as an independent election monitor, while its website also came under attack from hackers.