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EU-RUSSIA SUMMIT: HUMAN RIGHTS REQUIRE A COHERENT MESSAGE WITH ONE EU VOICE

(Brussels, 26 October) The EU should use today's Summit with the Russian Federation to press for progress on a number of key human rights issues, says Amnesty International.

One year since the killing of journalist and human rights defender Anna Politkovskaya, civil society activists and media continue to suffer pressure and intimidation, particularly those working on the North Caucasus. At least one journalist has reportedly had to flee the country in order to protect herself and her family.

This is only one side of the difficulties experienced by those who dare to speak out. In the North Caucasus, especially Ingushetia, the security situation has seriously deteriorated and there are accusations that the Federal Security Service has been involved in arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances and extra-judicial executions.

The way racist crimes have been addressed by Russian authorities is another serious concern. Despite some progress, violent racist attacks continue to occur in Russia with alarming regularity and there is an apparent reluctance from authorities to investigate and prosecute perpetrators.

"These are just some examples of the grave violations of human rights that occur in Russia today and undermine the country's credibility as a key actor and partner of the international community," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

"At the last Summit, in May in Samara, the EU was able to speak with one voice and firmly address the human rights problems in Russia. It is necessary to maintain that as an important signal to ordinary Russian citizens who want to live in a society that respects their rights", he added.

In a briefing (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) the human rights organization lists the key concerns which it asks the EU to address, namely:

- On-going human rights violations by state officials in the North Caucasus, particularly Ingushetia;
- The deterioration of freedom of expression and assembly in Russia, which has especially targeted civil society organizations;
- Cases of racist violence and apparent police inaction when faced with these crimes.

