

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

## News Flash

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### **Russian Federation: New law stifles independent civil society**

Amnesty International regrets that President Putin has signed into law the controversial amendments to laws governing civil society organizations in Russia. The law was published by the official government newspaper *Rossiiskaia gazeta* on 17 January 2006 and will come into force in three months' time.

"Amnesty International does not oppose efforts to ensure transparency and accountability of civil society organizations. However, this law gives excessive powers of scrutiny and discretion to the authorities in monitoring organizations and making decisions on their registration and closure," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme.

"These increased powers of scrutiny could be abused."

Despite the law going through amendments in response to domestic and international outcry, it still contains provisions which raise serious concerns about freedom of association in Russia. Many provisions have failed to take account of criticisms of the proposals made by a Council of Europe expert. Provisions the expert found "disproportionate", "too restrictive", and "vague" to be in line with international standards have remained in the law.

For example, the authorities will be able to deny registration to civil society organizations if the organization's name "offends public decency or ethnic and religious feelings". They will also have unlimited power to send representatives to any event organized by Russian and foreign civil society organizations, without necessarily having reasonable grounds to believe Russian law is being breached. They will also have unprecedented powers of scrutiny of sources of funding, as well as planned and actual spending.

"Civil society organizations across the board -- working on areas as diverse as the environment, education and human rights -- will be hampered in their work. Russia should be encouraging their civil society sector, not stifling it," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme.

This is not a political issue, nor a question of interference in Russia's internal affairs. Russia must respect its legal obligations under international human rights standards which it has signed up to."

**For background on the law see** *Russian Federation: Draft law -- the latest in clampdown on civil society* 22 November 2005, (AI Index: EUR 46/055/2005.)

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