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**Russia:
Supreme Court dismisses Prosecutor General's appeal against
acquittal of Aleksandr Nikitin**

Today's decision by the Russian Supreme Court to uphold the acquittal of Aleksandr Nikitin, is an encouraging sign of judicial independence, Amnesty International said. "This is particularly welcome as it comes amid continuing efforts by the Russian security services to restrict freedom of expression using arguments about state security," the organization added.

The Presidium of Russia's Supreme Court today dismissed the Prosecutor General's appeal against the earlier acquittal of Aleksandr Nikitin, a former prisoner of conscience charged with treason and espionage. The appeal was the last throw in a five-year-long Federal Security Service (FSB) led campaign of judicial persecution of Aleksandr Nikitin.

Aleksandr Nikitin was accused in 1996 of espionage and leaking state secrets after writing about the environmental risks posed by radiation leaks from the decaying vessels of Russia's Northern Fleet. He spent nearly two years in pre-trial detention and the FSB issued eight consecutive indictments against him before the St Petersburg City Court finally acquitted him in December 1999. The Supreme Court upheld this decision in April 2000.

Granting the Prosecutor General's appeal would have constituted a violation of Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees that no one shall be tried twice for the same offence.

Aleksandr Nikitin -- a retired Russian submarine captain -- was conducting environmental research for the Norwegian Bellona Foundation prior to his arrest.

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