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Russian businessmen declared prisoners of conscience after convictions are upheld

Amnesty International has declared Russian businessmen Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev prisoners of conscience after the two men's convictions on money laundering were today upheld by a Moscow court.

The Moscow City Court reduced the sentences of the two men from 13 ½ years' imprisonment to 12 but failed to address any of the serious procedural violations that have marred the criminal proceedings from the outset of the investigation.

"Whatever the rights and wrongs of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev's first convictions there can no longer be any doubt that their second trial was deeply flawed and politically motivated," said Nicola Duckworth, Amnesty International's Director for Europe and Central Asia.

"For several years now these two men have been trapped in a judicial vortex that answers to political not legal considerations. Today's verdict makes it clear that Russia's lower courts are unable, or unwilling, to deliver justice in their cases."

"The Supreme Court offers the last possible hope for justice. Their convictions must be overturned and the two men released on the expiry of their current sentences".

Following the conviction of the two men on 27 December 2010, Amnesty International expressed grave concerns over the timing of charges, the harassment of lawyers and witnesses and procedural violations including the exclusion of evidence that might have exonerated the defendants, and the denial of the right to examine and cross examine witnesses.

The organisation concluded that their convictions were unsafe and called for them to be overturned on appeal.

"The failure of the appeal court to address the fundamental flaws in the second trial and the fact that Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev have already spent eight years in jail on barely distinguishable charges, points to the conclusion that their second convictions have been sought for political reasons relating purely to who they are," said Nicola Duckworth.

"These two men must be released after their current sentences expire on 25 October and 2 July respectively."