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## **Russian Federation: Attack on prominent human rights activiste**

Last night's assault on human rights activist Lev Ponomarev must be investigated fully and independently by the Russian authorities. Those responsible must be brought to justice, Amnesty International said today.

"Far too many abuses against human rights and civil society activists, lawyers and journalists have gone unpunished and perpetrators believe they can act with total impunity," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

"President Dmitry Medvedev and the Russian government must speak out clearly against the increasing climate of intolerance towards human rights defenders and send a message that such abuses, whether by private individuals or by state officials, will not be tolerated."

"The continuing silence in view of the many recent threats and attacks will be equivalent to condoning such crimes."

According to For Human Rights, the non-governmental organization which is headed by Lev Ponomarev, the 67-year-old was attacked by three men late on 31 March, near his home in Moscow. Lev Ponomarev was thrown to the ground and kicked and beaten.

Lev Ponomarev has been speaking out against a wide range of human rights violations in the Russian Federation for decades. More recently he has been very critical of the authorities' handling of the case of the oil company YUKOS. A new trial of former head of YUKOS, Mikhail Khodorkovskii, and his associate, Platon Lebedev, started on 3 March in Moscow. Just prior to the attack Lev Ponomarev had met with Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, the Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, regarding allegations of politically-motivated abuses of the criminal justice system, in connection with this trial.

Lev Ponomarev has also criticized the Russian penal system repeatedly. At a press conference in June 2008 during which he described ill-treatment of detainees in penal colonies, he was attacked by a group of young people, allegedly acting on behalf of a Russian parliamentarian. The young men threw eggs at Lev Ponomarev and another human rights defender, Ludmilla Alekseeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group.

At the end of 2008, Lev Ponomarev told his family that he believed he was under surveillance.