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MEDIA ADVISORY

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Amnesty International sends observer to trial of Aleksandr Nikitin

**St Petersburg City Court
Naberezhnaya Reki Fontanki, 16
10.30am, 20 October 1998**

Amnesty International is sending an observer to the trial of Russia's high-profile human rights defender, Aleksandr Nikitin, which begins next week. Bill Bowring, a human rights lawyer and professor at Essex University, will be an observer for the first week of the trial.

Aleksandr Nikitin faces up to 20 years in prison for what the Russian authorities describe as an act of treason, and what Amnesty International and the international human rights movement call peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

On 30 June the case of Aleksandr Nikitin was finally referred to the St Petersburg City Court, after the St Petersburg Procurator confirmed the charges brought by the Federal Security Service (FSB) against Nikitin. He is still charged with treason and exposing state secrets while working for the Bellona Foundation.

Aleksandr Nikitin was arrested by the FSB on 6 February 1996, after writing two chapters for a Bellona report on the risks of radioactive pollution from Russia's Northern Fleet. Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience. He was held in pre-trial detention until 14 December 1996 when he was released. The charges against him, however, remained and he has been officially restricted to the city limits of St Petersburg pending trial.

During a mission in May, the Amnesty International delegation held a meeting with FSB officials in Moscow, during which the organization continued to urge that all charges against Aleksandr Nikitin be dropped and that the allegations of intimidation and harassment against him be fully and impartially investigated.

Mariana Katzarova, Researcher on the Russian Federation, will be available for comments after 18 October regarding the case of Aleksandr Nikitin. To contact her or to receive further information, please call Amnesty International's Press Office in London on: +44 171 413 5566/5808/5810. *Video footage of Aleksandr Nikitin is also available.*