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President Putin's visit: UK's David Cameron should 'dispense with kid gloves' on Syria and Pussy Riot

As the UK Prime Minister David Cameron prepares to meet the Russian President Vladimir Putin in London today, Amnesty International has urged Mr Cameron to "dispense with the kid gloves" in talks with Mr Putin and raise the issue of Russia's blocking of international action on Syria as well as the Pussy Riot trial and Russia's increasing intolerance of legitimate dissent.

Amnesty International Europe and Central Asia Director John Dalhuisen said:

"David Cameron needs to dispense with the kid gloves today."

"Mr Putin is famously a judo black belt but that shouldn't stop David Cameron grappling with him on Russia's deeply unhelpful behaviour over Syria at the United Nations Security Council."

"Russia should stop supplying arms to President Assad's government and should support a strengthening of the UN monitoring mission in the country and a referral of the crisis to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court."

"During Mr Putin's time in high office Russia has become increasingly intolerant of legitimate dissent and the Pussy Riot trial is just the latest example of this."

"By putting a group of women in balaclavas on trial Russia's own mask has slipped."

"David Cameron should politely - but firmly - tell it like it is on the Pussy Riot case: the trial is a disgrace and the charges should be dropped immediately."

Amnesty believes that the trial of the Pussy Riot defendants - Maria Alekhina, Ekaterina Samutsevich and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova - is politically-motivated, and that they are being prosecuted for what was a legitimate - if potentially offensive - protest action.

Amnesty International considers that the three women are prisoners of conscience and is calling on the Russian authorities to drop the charges against the three women and release them immediately.