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Russia: Assassin sentenced for journalist murder

Today's conviction of the killer of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya is welcome progress, but prosecutors must not rest until those who masterminded the assassination are brought to justice, Amnesty International said today.

Former police officer Dmitry Pavliutchenkov was found guilty and sentenced today to 11 years in a high security penal colony.

The trial of five other accomplices who worked with Pavliutchenkov to observe and assassinate Politkovskaya is expected to begin in March next year.

"While we welcome today's verdict and the long-awaited prosecutions of Anna Politkovskaya's killers, this case can never truly be closed until those who ordered her murder are named and brought to justice," said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International's Director for Europe and Central Asia.

A journalist and human rights defender known for her critical reports from Chechnya, Anna Politkovskaya was gunned down in the elevator of her building on 7 October 2006.

"We are urging prosecutors to keep digging up the truth, no matter how politically inconvenient," said John Dalhuisen.

Despite a special plea bargain to give evidence against those who ultimately ordered the killing, Pavliutchenkov only named two opposition exile figures in what Politkovskaya's family have called a 'politically motivated' testimony.

The family's lawyers plan to appeal, calling for Pavliutchenkov to be given a longer sentence.

Amnesty International is calling for better protection of journalists and human rights defenders in Russia, and an end to restrictions on freedom of expression.

Since Politkovskaya's death, journalists and human rights defenders have continued to face attacks and threats, and have been killed with impunity.

Recent restrictive initiatives have included the re-criminalization of libel, and the introduction of a bill by a government MP which would limit coverage of 'negative information' in the media. This could amount to censorship and undue restriction on the right to access to information.

"The Russian government's toxic habit of silencing those with dissenting or critical views has to stop," said John Dalhuisen.