

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 46/063/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 217
26 November 2002

Russian Federation: Lawmakers must abide by Russia's international obligations in safeguarding freedom of expression

Amnesty International urged Russian lawmakers to abide by Moscow's international and constitutional obligations regarding freedom of expression when working on laws that may have an impact on the media.

"We welcome President Vladimir Putin's decision to veto the proposed law amendments concerning the coverage of extreme situations. However, Russian parliamentarians must ensure that any amendments to the existing laws on media and on 'combatting terrorism' are consistent with international standards safeguarding the right of the public to receive information on which to form its opinion", said Amnesty International.

Russian journalists and human rights organizations praised President Putin for vetoing the amendments that were rushed through parliament earlier this month in the aftermath of the Moscow theatre hostage-taking last October. They would have imposed tight curbs on reporting in similar situations as well as on events in and surrounding Chechnya, and would have barred the media from identifying members of the special forces and crisis units without their permission.

Freedom of expression is recognized as a key human right in such international treaties as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Amnesty International reminded Russian lawmakers that Moscow is a signatory to these international documents whose supremacy over national legislation is recorded in the country's Constitution.

"Restrictions on media only, imposed in general terms, can easily be exploited to put pressure on journalists, to stifle criticism and public debate, and to encourage impunity and corruption.", added Amnesty International.

Background

The law amendments were rushed through parliament in the wake of last month's Moscow theatre hostage-taking which claimed the lives of some 150 people. The Russian authorities criticized the decision of some Russian media to air interviews with Chechen hostage-takers and Chechen leaders during the siege, and imposed restrictions on the coverage of the crisis.

The amendments were criticized as an attempt to introduce censorship and to undermine freedom of expression by human rights organizations.

For further information contact the Russia Campaign Press Officer Lydia Aroyo on +44 20 7413 5599 or +44 7798 555 629 or the Russia Campaign Researcher Kim Wiesener on +44 20 7413 5618.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>