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Human rights defenders in Russia facing threats and intimidation

Human rights defenders in Russia are becoming victims of human rights abuses themselves, when they expose the actions and policies of their government, particularly in Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus.

The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) is a non-governmental organization that monitors human rights violations in Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus, producing daily press releases on "disappearances" and other serious human rights violations.

The RCFS also undertakes humanitarian initiatives for individuals affected by the conflict in the North Caucasus, for example, organizing medical assistance and holiday breaks for children from the conflict zone.

Since 2000 there have been a number of cases of alleged torture and ill-treatment, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of members of the RCFS. Most recently there appears to be a campaign of harassment coordinated by the Russian authorities aimed at closing down the organization.

Stanislav Dmitrievskii

Criminal proceedings are underway against Stanislav Dmitrievskii, executive director of the RCFS and the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Pravo-Zashchita* ("Rights Protection").

Stanislav Dmitrievskii faces charges of incitement of hatred or enmity under the Russian Criminal Code for publishing articles written by the late Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov and his envoy, Akhmed Zakayev. Both articles contained calls for a peaceful resolution of the Chechen conflict.

Amnesty International is concerned that the prosecution of Stanislav Dmitrievskii on these charges is a violation of his right to freedom of expression. The organization would consider him a prisoner of conscience should he be sentenced to imprisonment.

Oksana Chelysheva and Stanislav Dmitrievskii

On 14 March 2005, threatening leaflets were distributed in the neighbourhood of Nizhni Novgorod where RCFS editor Oksana Chelysheva lives. The leaflets, which gave her home address, labelled Oksana Chelysheva as a traitor, a supporter and a helper of "terrorist" activities carried out by Chechen fighters, and claimed that she was financed by them.

On 9 September 2005, a leaflet was posted on Stanislav Dmitrievskii's door, which read: "we say no to the pro-Chechen vermin, which live among us at our expense. Death to the enemy! We are waiting for you." Police investigations have yet to identify a suspect responsible for distributing the leaflets.

Write to the Russian authorities asking them to:

- Respect the work of human rights defenders and ensure that they can carry out their legitimate work in safety and without fear of harassment or intimidation
- Formally drop the charges against Stanislav Dmitrievskii; charged for peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression

- Publicly condemn any threats and attacks against human rights defenders by non-state actors
- Conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the threats against Stanislav Dmitrievskii and Oksana Chelysheva; make any findings public; and bring those responsible to justice

Procurator General of the Russian Federation
Vladimir V. Ustinov,
General Procuracy of the Russian Federation,
Ul.Bolshaia Dmitrovka 15a
Moscow
125993
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 095 921 4186 +7 095 692 88 48



Stanislav Dmitrievskii of the RCFS
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