

EXTERNAL

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Death penalty

1 November 1996

RUSSIAN FEDERATION 455 people at risk of execution despite official commitment to moratorium

Amnesty International fears for the lives of 455 people under sentence of death in the Russian Federation, whose petitions are pending decision with the Russian Presidential Clemency Commission.

Amnesty International fears that their lives are in danger despite the fact that the Russian Federation committed, on joining the Council of Europe on 28 February 1996, "to sign within one year and ratify within three years from the time of accession Protocol no.6 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on the abolition of the death penalty, and put into place, with immediate effect from the day of accession, a moratorium on executions" (Parliamentary Assembly Opinion 190, 1995).

At a press conference on 24 September 1996, Anatoly Pristavkin, head of the Russian Presidential Clemency Commission, said that 53 people have been executed in Russia since Russia joined the Council of Europe. There are fears that executions are continuing to this day.

At the same press conference Valery Borshev, representative of a public consultative body on human rights under the President, said that according to research carried out in Russia, judicial errors were made in 30 per cent of death penalty cases.

Anatoly Pristavkin told Amnesty International on 24 October 1996 that there are 455 people under sentence of death awaiting consideration of their petitions for clemency with the Clemency Commission. According to the Head of the Commission, even if the Commission should recommend clemency, the President does not always grant it. President Yeltsin reportedly turned down 46 petitions for clemency in February and April 1996 and since then the Clemency Commission has not passed any cases on to the President.

In violation of the law, the Presidential Administration reportedly passed clemency petitions directly to the President, without informing the Clemency Commission. In May 1996, President Yeltsin reportedly refused to grant clemency to 22 or 23 prisoners. None of these petitions for clemency had been previously reviewed by the Clemency Commission.

According to the information available to Amnesty International, as of the beginning of 1996 about 700 people were under sentence of death in the Russian Federation. Some of them are still awaiting the outcome of their appeals through the courts and have not yet submitted petitions for clemency.

On 4 October, Vyacheslav Lebedev, chairman of the Russian Federation Supreme Court, said on Russian television that 73 people have been sentenced to death so far this year. He also said that in the first six months of 1996 the Supreme Court considered appeals in 116 death penalty cases.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/telegrams/express/airmail letters in Russian/English/own language, in equal numbers to the four addressees:

To the President:

- urging President Yeltsin to grant clemency to the 455 prisoners on death row, and insisting that he immediately cease signing all execution orders,

since to do so places Russia in violation of its commitment to the Council of Europe; (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe warned in a resolution of 25 June 1996 that violation of the commitments made on accession to the Council of Europe may lead to the suspension of Russia from rights of representation in the Parliamentary Assembly, or to expulsion from the Council of Europe);

To the Head of the Central Directorate for the Execution of Punishment (GUIN) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

- urging General Yury Kalinin, as a means of ensuring the implementation of the commitment to the Council of Europe, to impose an immediate moratorium on executions, to issue an order to all prison directors and personnel to stop all executions in their prisons, and to not transfer prisoners to other prisons where executions take place;

To the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

- informing him that AI is demanding that President Yeltsin not sign any more execution orders, and reminding him of the importance of the Russian Federation's honouring its commitment to the Council of Europe to impose an immediate moratorium on executions;

To the Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation:

- informing him that AI is demanding that the President not sign any more execution orders, and reminding him of the importance of the Russian Federation honouring its commitment to an immediate moratorium on executions;
- asking him to support the draft law introduced by the State Duma Committee on Legislation in June 1996 on the implementation of a moratorium on executions, and urging him to work for the rapid passing of legislation abolishing the death penalty for all crimes.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin
Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
g. Moskva, Kreml
Prezidentu Rossiyskoy Federatsii
Yeltsinu B.N

Faxes: +7095 206 51 73

Telegrams: Rossiya, Moskva, Prezidentu Yeltsinu

Salutation: Dear President

To the Head of the Central Directorate for the Execution of Punishment (GUIN) at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Yury KALININ

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
g. Moskva 103861
Bolshaya Bronnaya d.23
Glavnoye upravlenie po ispolneniyu nakazaniya
Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del
Generalu Kalininu Yu.

Faxes: +7095 230 2580

Telegrams: Rossiya, Moskva, MVD, GUIN, Generalu Kalininu

Salutation: Dear General Kalinin

Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Yevgeny Primakov

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya
g. Moskva 121200
Smolenskaya-Sennaya pl., 32/34
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del RF
Ministru Primakovu Ye.

Faxes: + 7095 230 21 30

Telegrams: Rossiya, Moskva, MID, Ministru Primakovu

Salutation: Dear Minister

Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Gennadiy SELEZNEV

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya

103009 g. Moskva

Okhotny ryad, 1

Gosudarstvennaya Duma Rossiyskoy Federatsii

Predsedatelyu SELEZNEVU G.

Fax: +7095 292 53 58

Telegrams: Rossiya, Moskva, Duma, Predsedatelyu SELEZNEVU

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES to diplomatic representatives of RUSSIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 December 1996.