

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Amnesty International calls on the OSCE to uphold its own principles of protection of freedom of expression.**

Amnesty International learned that the human rights organization Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RChFS) had been denied registration at an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High-Level Meeting on victims of terrorism which took place in Vienna on 13 and 14 September. The Spanish government, which currently holds the Chairmanship of the OSCE, had reportedly announced prior to the meeting that a participating member of the OSCE, which appears to be the Russian Federation, had objected to the participation of the non-governmental organization (NGO) and had threatened to leave the conference should the RChFS be allowed to participate. A representative of the Russian government had apparently stated that the RChFS was an extremist organization, which had published statements by internationally known terrorists. The Chairmanship apparently therefore decided to deny registration to the human rights NGO. Several delegations from other member states as well as NGOs present at the meeting criticised this decision by the Spanish government.

According to its own rules the OSCE only excludes from its major public conferences those persons or NGOs which "resort to the use of violence or publicly condone terrorism or the use of violence". Amnesty International has followed the case of the RChFS for several years and holds that the organization, when publishing articles by Chechen separatist leaders exercised their right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International is concerned about the failure by the OSCE Chairmanship to uphold its own rules and principles. The organization calls on all member states of the OSCE to fully respect the right to freedom of expression.

#### **Background**

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern that the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society as well as a linked organization, the Foundation for the Support of Tolerance, have been subjected to harassment and persecution by the Russian authorities because of the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. In January 2007 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation confirmed an earlier decision by a court in Nizhnii Novgorod to close the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society after the Executive director of the RChFS, Stanislav Dmitrievskii, was convicted on 3 February 2006 on "race hate" charges linked to the publication of non-violent articles by Chechen separatist leaders. He was, in the view of Amnesty International, convicted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and should not have faced trial in the first place. The RChFS has since been registered in Finland.

On 17 August 2007, a court in Nizhnii Novgorod decided to impose further restrictions on Stanislav Dmitrievskii, who is serving a conditional sentence. According to this new decision, any violation by Stanislav Dmitrievskii of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation, such as crossing the street when the pedestrian light is red, can lead to a court deciding to change his conditional sentence to imprisonment.

The recently founded Nizhnii Novgorod Foundation for the Support of Tolerance is run by former members of the RChFS. On 29 August 2007, the office of the organization was raided by police from the Department to fight organized crime, who seized four computers on the allegation that the software used on these computers may not be licensed. Staff at the Foundation declared they were able to show on the computer that the software was lawfully acquired by them, but were unable to provide a written licence.

