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Russian Federation: President Putin must condemn the murder of Anna Politkovskaya

Amnesty International has called on President Vladimir Putin to condemn the murder of Anna Politkovskaya and show that there can be no impunity for such crimes. This would demonstrate his support for human rights defenders and independent journalists and the vital and legitimate role they play in Russian society.

In a letter to President Putin, Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General, said:

"We believe that it is crucial for such a strong political statement of support to come from the highest authority in Russia, the President. The statement should make clear that attacks on independent journalists and human rights defenders are unacceptable and that perpetrators of such attacks will face vigorous investigation and prosecution."

Amnesty International is shocked and appalled at the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya on 7 October. Amnesty International believes that Anna Politkovskaya was in all likelihood targeted because of her work as a journalist, reporting on human rights abuses in Chechnya and other regions of the Russian Federation. It is clear that such a murder is a serious blow to freedom of expression and the independence of the media in Russia.

"We note that the office of the procuracy was swift to open an investigation into her murder, and that Yuri Chaika, Procurator General, has taken charge of this investigation. We are urging the Russian authorities to ensure that this investigation be prompt, thorough and impartial, with the findings made public, and that suspected perpetrators be brought to justice in accordance with international law," Irene Khan said.

Amnesty International has also noted that President Putin has stated that all necessary measures will be taken to investigate Anna Politkovskaya's murder, and that the President and Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic have spoken out against her murder.

"However we believe that the Russian authorities need to do far more to support and protect human rights defenders and independent journalists in Russia," Irene Khan said.

Together with other Russian and international non-governmental organizations, (NGOs), Amnesty International wrote to President Putin in March of this year, in the run up to Russia taking on the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, asking him to make a statement in support of human rights defenders and independent media. In July this year, he met with Russian and international NGOs, including Amnesty International, during the Civil G8 event.

"President Putin must follow through such initiatives by responding to individual cases of egregious attacks on individual activists and journalists. Without such a response, there is a danger that initiatives such as the Civil G8 are only a public relations exercise," Irene Khan said.

The organization also asked President Putin to personally ensure that the authorities investigate all reported instances of harassment, intimidation and threats of human rights defenders and independent journalists in Russia, and that officials at every level of the state apparatus, including law enforcement officials, respect the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders and independent journalists and allow them to carry out their work without hindrance or harassment.

"President Putin must show unequivocal commitment to protecting the rights of independent media and NGOs in Russia. Without President Putin's personal commitment little will change," Irene Khan said.

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