

AI Index: PRE01/235/2010
12 July 2010

Russia art convictions a blow to freedom of expression

Amnesty International has condemned the conviction of the organizers of a Russian art exhibition which used religious symbols on charges of “inciting hatred or enmity”.

A Moscow court today sentenced Andrei Yerofeev, the exhibition curator, and Yuri Samodurov, then director of the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Centre, where the Forbidden Art 2006 exhibition was staged, to fines of 150,000 roubles (US\$4,800) and 200,000 roubles (US\$6,442) respectively.

Andrei Yerofeev and Yuri Samodurov are to appeal the verdicts.

“These shameful verdicts are yet another blow to freedom of expression in Russia. Such judgements have no place in a state supposedly ruled by law,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

The prosecution claimed that Yuri Samodurov and Andrei Yerofeev, had arranged the exhibits, some of which used religious symbolism, in such a way that they incited enmity and hatred and also denigrated the dignity of Christian groups, in particular Orthodox Christians.

“None of the works incited enmity or hatred. Freedom of expression cannot be restricted or prohibited simply on the grounds that some people find the views expressed offensive or disagreeable,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“Yuri Samodurov and Andrei Yerofeev were convicted solely because they dared to show a number of censored art works that had been refused public display at other exhibitions.”

The exhibition featured pieces by some of Russia’s most well-known contemporary artists, such as Ilya Kabakov, Alexander Kosolapov, the group “Blue Noses”, Aleksandr Savko and Mikhail Roginskii.

The exhibits included works that included Mickey Mouse instead of Jesus Christ in paintings portraying scenes from the Bible.