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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION: THE COMMITMENT TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY MUST BECOME A REALITY**

Amnesty International today welcomed the official government statement by the Minister of Justice that the Russian Federation will abolish the death penalty by April 1999.

“The renewed pledge by the Russian authorities to fulfil their commitment on joining the Council of Europe on 28 February 1996 to abolish the death penalty within three years is a welcome development,” Amnesty International said. “However, we remain seriously concerned at the deep gap emerging between the Government’s declared intentions and the reality.”

No official moratorium on executions has been put in place in the Russian Federation, although the authorities claim that no executions have taken place since August 1996. According to official government information, as of 30 April, 894 prisoners remained on death row. People continue to be sentenced to death.

The organization is concerned that the Presidential list of federal laws to be adopted this year relating to human rights, as part of the initiatives to mark the Year of Human Rights in the Russian Federation declared by President Yeltsin, does not mention the introduction in national law of a moratorium on executions. Also, there is no mention of ratifying Protocol 6 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, relating to the abolition of the death penalty.

Amnesty International is especially concerned about the Government’s official opinion on the draft law on a moratorium, signed on 30 April by the Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, that the death penalty should not be abolished because of the expense of providing life imprisonment for some 1,300 death penalty prisoners by the year 2000. In other words: it would be cheaper to kill than to protect human rights.

Amnesty International has noticed with great concern the apparent retreat from the government’s commitment in the debate which has been taking place in parliament, as well as the statements earlier this year by the newly elected Human Rights Ombudsman, Oleg Mironov; a letter to the President by the Procurator General, Yury Skuratov, who insisted on preserving the death penalty; and statements in May by the Minister of Justice, Pavel Krasheninnikov, that the Russian Federation was, in his words, “not ready to annul the death penalty.”

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to take immediately the following steps:

- The President and the central government should issue public orders to all prison governors that there is an official moratorium on executions in place.
- All existing death sentences should be commuted. No further death sentences should be handed down. Any that are handed down should immediately be commuted.

- The government and parliament must adopt a law on a moratorium on executions pending the full abolition of the death penalty. The parliament should enact the legislation, prepared by the Ministry of Justice, to remove the death penalty from the Russian penal code. The constitution also should be amended to exclude the death penalty.
- The Russian Federation should move swiftly to ratify Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights. The Government should fully abolish the death penalty by 28 February 1999, the deadline set by the Council of Europe on Russia's accession in 1996.
- The authorities should publish comprehensive information on the use of the death penalty, including the names and case details of all prisoners executed and all prisoners currently under sentence of death, and should remove the secrecy surrounding executions.

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