

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: EUR 46/039/2013
20 September 2013

Further attacks on freedoms of expression, association and assembly, reprisals against NGOs and harassment of human rights defenders in Russia

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Russia

Amnesty International is disappointed that a range of important recommendations concerning the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association have been rejected by the Russian Federation.¹ Since the organization submitted information for the UPR last October these rights have been continually encroached upon.

Some of the recommendations made to the Russian Federation addressed recently introduced legislation which restricts these freedoms, and since the review in April 2013, two additional laws were adopted in June. The first one outlaws blasphemy and envisages considerable penalties, including imprisonment, and the second law introduces a legal framework which discriminates against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community by imposing fines and other sanctions for “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations amongst minors”. Those who took to the streets on 11 June to peacefully protest against the adoption of these laws by parliament were assaulted by counter-protesters and then dispersed and detained by police with the use of force.

Another new law obliges NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in what the law vaguely defines as “political activities” to join a register of “organizations performing the functions of foreign agents”. Regrettably, the Russian Federation rejected the many recommendations to revise or repeal this requirement.² As a consequence of this law there has been a series of unannounced “inspections” to the offices of several hundred NGOs by members of the Prosecutor’s Office, the Ministry of Justice and the tax authorities. These inspections have in many cases been followed by formal warnings requesting that the NGOs join the register. Several NGOs and their leaders have been summoned to appear before the court and have been issued with extortionate fines if they failed to do so.

Amnesty International welcomes Russia’s acceptance of recommendations to protect human rights defenders and to investigate and prosecute all allegations of violence and intimidation against them.³ However, harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and criminal defence lawyers continues, and the previous such cases, including a number of killings, remain unresolved.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Russia on 20 September 2013 during its 24th session. Prior to the adoption of the review outcome, Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above.

¹ A/HRC/24/14, recommendations 140.151(Norway), 140.153 (Austria), 140.158 (Czech Republic), 140.161 (Austria), 140.163 (Romania), 140.165 (Slovakia), 140.169 (Sweden), 140.183 (USA)

² A/HRC/24/14/Add.1, pages 21-23.

³ A/HRC/24/14, recommendations 140.148-150, 140.157, 140.159, 140.166-167.

Amnesty International had earlier submitted information on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR46/006/2013/en/b69c5953-136c-4e78-b23a-defa32494a43/eur460062013en.pdf>

Field Code Ch

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