

AI INDEX: EUR 46/40/98
21 November 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

RUSSIA

Amnesty International condemns the political murder of Russian human rights advocate Galina Starovoitova

Amnesty International is appalled by the murder in St Petersburg last night of prominent Russian member of parliament and human rights advocate, Galina Starovoitova.

The organization believes that the reason for her murder was her outspoken criticism of corruption among the political elite, and to prevent her from continuing her work as an advocate and defender of human rights.

Just two days before her murder eight serving officers of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), alleged at a press conference in Moscow that the organization had been involved in extortion, terrorism, hostage-taking and contract killing.

It was reported that one of the officers, Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr Litvinenko, stated that he had been threatened after refusing to carry out an order to murder businessman Boris Berezovsky. He also allegedly stated that certain senior officials had used the FSB for their own private political and material purposes, to settle accounts with undesirable persons, and to carry out private political and criminal orders for a fee.

Director General of the FSB, Vladimir Putin, was reported earlier today as saying, "I do not have any elements from which I can conclude that this was a political murder". An investigation into the murder has been reportedly opened today and the FSB has been ordered to lead the investigation.

Galina Starovoitova has been a good friend and supporter of Amnesty International for years. The organization considered her one of the leading human rights defenders and advocates, and the most prominent woman politician in Russia today.

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities for the findings of the criminal investigation into the murder of Galina Starovoitova to be made public and anyone found guilty to be brought to justice in accordance with international law.

The organization believes that in view of the recent reports about the FSB, the investigation of this murder should be transferred from the FSB to another independent body within the Office of the Procurator General or the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Amnesty International is also urging the government of the Russian Federation to take

urgent steps to ensure the safety of human rights advocates and outspoken critics by sending a clear public message that abuses against them will not be tolerated and will be punished in accordance with the national law and international standards.

Amnesty International extends its fullest sympathy to Galina Starovoitova's family.

Background

According to the police, a man and a woman intercepted Galina Starovoitova and one of her aides, Ruslan Linkov, in the stairwell of her apartment in the centre of St Petersburg on Friday night and shot them with an automatic weapon and a pistol. The Russian police reported that Galina Starovoitova was shot directly in the head and killed instantly, while her aide was hospitalized with serious head wounds.

A co-chair of the Democratic Russia party and former Presidential advisor on ethnic and nationalities affairs, she was an outspoken opponent of the Communists and nationalists, who dominate the lower house of the Russian parliament.

According to reports, several days before her murder, she had publicly attacked in a statement one of the leaders of the nationalists, General Albert Makhashov.

Again according to reports, on 4 November she said in an interview that she knew the funding sources for the Communist faction of Duma speaker Gennady Seleznyov. In the same interview, she reportedly stated that she knew about corruption surrounding the local elections in St Petersburg and the names of politicians involved in receiving bribes from mafia groups. She further stated that she was aware that the seat in the St Petersburg local elections had been sold for \$100,000 to a criminal group from the city of Tambov.

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