

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 46/048/2006 (Public)  
News Service No: 266  
13 October 2006

## **Russian Federation: Russian Chechen Friendship Society closed under new NGO law**

Amnesty International deplores the decision to close the Russian Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS). A court in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod ruled today to close down the RCFS which monitors human rights violations in Chechnya.

"Today's verdict appears to be the latest move in a carefully calculated strategy to get rid of an organization that has been outspoken on behalf of victims of human rights violations in Chechnya," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe and Central Asia Programme at Amnesty International.

"The strategy started with the harassment of its activists, and escalated to simultaneous legal actions against the organization and its members in a further attempt to paralyze their work."

The court acted on a new law that makes it illegal for a non-governmental organization (NGO) to be headed by a person convicted of "extremist" activities. The Executive director of the RCFS, Stanislav Dmitrievskii, was convicted on 3 February 2006 on "race hate" charges, for publishing non-violent articles by Chechen separatist leaders. He was, in the view of Amnesty International, convicted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and should not have faced trial in the first place.

"Not only has Stanislav Dmitrievskii personally suffered due to the wrongful conviction against him, now his conviction has served as the grounds for closing down a valued human rights and humanitarian organization," Nicola Duckworth said.

"Is this the first fruit of the new NGO law and a blueprint for further crackdown on independent voices?"

Amnesty International considers that the conviction against Stanislav Dmitrievskii should be quashed and the Russian Chechen Friendship Society should be allowed to continue its important work.

The court ruling allows the RCFS two months in which to prepare for closure, during which time the organization can appeal the decision. Stanislav Dmitrievskii told Amnesty International that the organization will appeal to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. He said:

"The court ruling will not stop our human rights work - in one way or another we will carry on. The authorities are wrong if they think that they have silenced us."

### **Background**

The RCFS monitors human rights violations in Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus. Staff and volunteers in Nizhnii Novgorod and the North Caucasus produce daily press releases on “disappearances” and other serious human rights violations which are disseminated by the organization’s project, the Russian Chechen Information Agency. In 2005, the organization simultaneously underwent legal action by the tax authorities and the registration department of the Ministry of Justice. At the same time, both Stanislav Dmitrievskii and another staff member, Oksana Chelysheva, were the subject of threatening leaflets. The leaflets accused the human rights defenders of being “traitors” and supporters of “terrorists”.

Public Document

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