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Russian Federation: End impunity for violence against human rights defenders and journalists

Recent attacks on independent journalists and human rights activists illustrate the risks under which they work in Russia, Amnesty International said on the eve of the second anniversary of Anna Politkovskaya's murder. The organization urges the Russian authorities to end impunity for violence against human rights defenders and the media.

"Human rights activists and journalists are the ones who bring to the public's attention the failure of governments to live up to their promises of justice and rights protection made in national law and their obligations under international human rights treaties," Amnesty International said.

"However, it is the human rights activists and journalists in Russia who too often themselves face harassment by the authorities and even become victims of human rights abuses themselves."

In a country where TV and many other media outlets are controlled by the state, there is less and less space for independent reporting. Those journalists who attempt to report independently are obstructed from conducting their professional work and they may face intimidation and possibly prosecution. For example, the radio station Ekho Moskvy was repeatedly asked to provide transcripts of their programmes to the prosecutor's office in relation to preliminary investigations into allegations that they had aired extremists' views.

The space to express critical views in the Russian Federation has been gradually and progressively curtailed in recent years.

"Two years after the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, human rights activists and journalists are still at risk in the Russian Federation, in particular in the North Caucasus region. They may be abducted and tortured, have their property attacked, receive death threats or killed in suspicious circumstances," Amnesty International said.

Anna Politkovskaya was murdered on 7 October 2006 in the centre of Moscow. Two years after the killing, three people accused of involvement in the crime are in detention, but her murderer is still at large and there has been no independent investigation into those who may have ordered the killing.

"Anna Politkovskaya was one of those courageous people who tirelessly stand up for those who have suffered human rights violations. She was in all likelihood killed because of this," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International urges the Russian authorities to ensure on all levels that justice will be done in regard to her murder and to demonstrate clearly that there is no impunity for attacks on human rights defenders and journalists. The human rights organization will continue to follow the case closely and will continue to call for the protection of journalists and human rights defenders in the Russian Federation.

Cases

The disputed killing in police custody of Magomed Evloev, owner of an independent Ingush website, on 31 August 2008, needs to be investigated with utmost impartiality, to ensure that the circumstances under which he died are brought to light and that those who are responsible for his death are charged and tried in accordance with the law.

On 25 July 2008, human rights defender Zurab Tsechoev, working for the human rights organization MASHR (peace) in Ingushetia, was taken away from his home in Troitskaia, Ingushetia by armed men, thought to be federal law enforcement officials. A couple of hours later he was found on a roadside near Magas, the capital of Ingushetia, with serious injuries. He had to be hospitalized. Amnesty International calls for the perpetrators of this act against Zurab Tsechoev to be identified and to be brought to justice.

Late on 1 August 2008, an arson attack was allegedly made on the flat of human rights defender Dmitrii Kraiukhin from the town of Orel in the Central Russian Federal District. The arsonists had also allegedly tried to block the entrance door. Luckily, Dmitrii Kraiukhin was reportedly not in the flat, but his relatives who were, were able to alert the fire brigade in time. So far, to Amnesty International's knowledge, no criminal investigation into this case has been undertaken, as the authorities allegedly considered the damage too insignificant to warrant a criminal investigation. However, this is not an isolated incident as far as threats to Dmitrii Kraiukhin are concerned.

On 14 August 2008, unknown assailants threw a brick through the window of the flat in Nizhnii Novgorod where human rights activist Stanislav Dmitrievskii lives. Luckily, nobody was hurt. At the same time, the entrance of his apartment building was covered with abusive language and threats against Stanislav Dmitrievskii. A criminal investigation into this attack has been opened.