

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Oksana Chelysheva and I am here to represent the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, the Nizhny Novgorod Foundation to Support Tolerance and the Nizhny Novgorod edition of the Novaya Gazeta. I have to point out that according to the OSCE principles, I also have a right to represent myself as a human rights defender and a journalist.

On behalf of all members of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society and numerous people who support us in different regions of Russia I cordially thank you for accepting our organization to participating in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting this year. By this act of solidarity, you are definitely providing the Russian civil society with extremely important support in these hard times. I would like to draw your attention that the Russian authorities don't hesitate to manipulate with the terrorist threats and the anti-terror legislation in a way that it becomes just a tool to persecute and harass civil society by labeling them as extremists and now even as terrorists.

To my regret, all our attempts to establish constructive dialogue with the Russian authorities have failed. They continue their defamation campaign against those human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists who they regard as disloyal to them. I have to claim that the Russian Federation has deliberately tried to mislead the OSCE and consequently violated the principle of good faith that is among the main principles of the international law. The RCFS was closed down with the ruling of the Russian Supreme Court under the charges of extremism under the NGO Law and Law in counteracting Extremism that have been widely criticized by the international community. It is a fact that we are appealing at the European Court of Human Rights.

However, the RCFS has never been charged with supporting terrorist activities. We, members of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society appreciate open support that a group of acts of terror came up with at the OSCE High Level Meeting on Victims of terror in Vienna. We can't but express our compassion with people who have lost their nearest and dearest and who have been targeted again by the authorities when they called them enemies of Russia just for their attempt to expose the results of the independent investigations into acts of terror.

Silencing desperate situation of victims of wars in Chechnya as victims of terrorists, complete irresponsibility in regard to the crisis in the North Caucasus and its further spreading as well as strengthening authoritarian regime in Russia are the main features of the Russian internal policy.

We have provided the OSCE with relevant information concerning our activities aimed at promotion of peace and justice. I have to point out that Anna Politkovskaya has come to our support even after her murder as one of the papers requested by the OSCE is the tape script of her testimony in court in defense of Stanislav Dmitrievsky.

We have always felt our moral obligation to commemorate Anna Politkovskaya with organizing an international event in Nizhny Novgorod. We are planning to hold it on 5-6 October. Today we have been banned from holding this event. The decision has been made by the Federal Financial Monitoring Department that used to be headed by the present Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov.

Once again the authorities are coming with accusations of extremism and terrorism in order to silence all independent voices inside Russia and present us as marginalized groups to the international community. It is the authorities that were forcing us out of the transparent, legitimate field of activities.

We call on the member states of the OSCE, the EU and the USA to monitor closely the situation in Nizhny Novgorod and numerous cases of harassment of independent human rights defenders and journalists as well as civil society activists as the authorities are evidently trying to send a tough threatening message to the whole civil society in Russia in order to suppress it.

We also call on the HR Committee at the PACE to initiate investigation in the situation on the filed in Nizhny Novgorod as we do feel concerned about our freedom and integrity.

Thank you.