

# **THE OBSERVATORY**

## **for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**

**L'OBSERVATOIRE**  
pour la Protection des défenseurs des droits de  
l'Homme

**EL OBSERVATORIO**  
para la Protección  
de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos

## **OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**

### **WARSAW – 24 September - 5 October 2007**

**Oral contribution of**  
The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH)  
and  
The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Within the framework of their joint programme  
**The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders**  
under working session 17 of the agenda on "Freedom of assembly and association"  
October 4, 2007



International Federation for Human Rights  
17, Passage de la Main d'Or  
75 011 Paris, France



World Organisation Against Torture  
Case postale 21 - 8 rue du Vieux-Billard  
1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland

The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human

Rights Defenders, first wish to recall that almost one year ago, on October 7, 2006, the independent journalist and human rights activist **Anna Politkovskaya** was assassinated. The Observatory reiterates its deep indignation and sadness, and calls for impartiality and transparency throughout the investigation that is currently taking place so that those responsible for the assassination as well as those who planned it be brought to justice.

In terms of freedom of association, in 2007, *Belarus*, *Kyrgyzstan* and the *Russian Federation* have continued to rely on restrictive laws and measures, to further control the independent civil society.

\*\* In *Belarus*, the independent NGO “Viasna”, which had been closed down in 2003 in a context of massive violation of the right to freedom of association, was denied the right to re-register in July 2007, despite a Communication of the United Nations Human Rights Committee issued one month earlier, which pointed out that Viasna had to be re-registered.

\*\* In the *Russian Federation*, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, Alexandre Stepanov, the Director of the NGO Department of the Federal Registration Service (FRS), declared that 467 NGOs operating in Russia would have to be shut down and that 2,307 others would have to cease their activities because they were violating the Federal Law on NGOs, which entered into force in 2006.

- Moreover, in June 2007, the District Court of Nizhnyi Novgorod ordered that the **International Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM)**, be taken off the federal registry on recognised NGOs for “violating the Federal Law on NGOs”, on the grounds that it allegedly did not provide the necessary documentation.

- In addition, acts of harassment and intimidation were documented in Nizhnyi-Novgorod at the end of August 2007, against the premises of the **Nizhnyi-Novgorod Foundation to Support Tolerance** (the new name under which the RCFS is registered in Finland), the **Nizhnyi-Novgorod Centre to Support Migrants**, the **Nizhnyi-Novgorod Human Rights Alliance** and the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*.

\*\* In *Kyrgyzstan*, the **Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights (KCHR)** was once again denied registration in July 2007 and its members have continued to be harassed. In addition, the Observatory is concerned with new guidelines on NGO funding recently issued by the Kyrgyz financial police, could pose a threat to freedom of association.

In front of repeated violations of OSCE commitments by some participating States, not only in terms of freedom of association but also with regards to freedom of peaceful gathering, freedom of expression, etc., the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established a Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions.

The Observatory, which has been working towards the establishment of a protection mechanism for defenders for several years, welcomes the creation of this Focal Point, and considers it as an important tool that will be able to keep the issues faced by human rights defenders on the forefront.

The Observatory calls on the OSCE participating States to provide the Focal Point with the capacity and adequate means to conduct its monitoring and capacity building activities, and to develop new activities in view of increased protection of human rights defenders, including individual protection in case of emergency.