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Russia: One year after death of Anna Politkovskaya - more action needed from the Russian authorities

During this week, people all around the world, including members and supporters of Amnesty International, will commemorate Russian journalist and human rights defender Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered on 7 October 2006 outside her flat in Moscow. She was almost certainly killed because of her work as a journalist, in which she exposed human rights violations throughout Russia. Amnesty International believes that the handling to date of the criminal investigation into her death shows that there is little political will to bring those who ordered the killing to justice.

Since late August 2007 at least 12 people have been detained in connection with the murder but several were released when it transpired that they had an alibi. The publicly named suspects in the case include officials from the Ministry of Interior, the Federal Security Service (FSB) and a former head of a local administration in Chechnya. However, a year after the death of Anna Politkovskaya, not only does the murderer still need to be identified, but there appears to be no progress in the investigation to determine who ordered the killing. While Anna Politkovskaya's former colleagues from the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* (New Newspaper) had expressed satisfaction throughout the year over the work done by the group at the Office of the General Prosecutor responsible for the investigation of the murder, they are now concerned that those who ordered the killing will not be brought to justice. In addition, the lawyer of three Chechen brothers who are among those detained for their alleged involvement in the murder, has claimed his clients have been ill-treated. This, as well as the apparently mistaken detention of other suspects, gives rise to the fear that the investigation is not conducted in full line with the requirements of the law.

Anna Politkovskaya faced intimidation and harassment from the Russian and Chechen authorities due to her outspoken criticism of government policy and action. After she began writing in 1999 about the armed conflict in Chechnya and the North Caucasus, she was detained, and threatened with serious reprisals, including death threats, on several occasions. She interviewed Russians, Chechens and members of other ethnic groups who reported being tortured or otherwise ill-treated, or to whom justice had otherwise reportedly been denied by the authorities of the Russian Federation. For exposing in her reporting serious human rights violations, corruption and other violations of the law in the Russian Federation, she was branded as a supporter of "terrorists", and as an enemy of the Russian people. This did not stop her, but rather - recognizing the restrictions which continue to hamper the independent reporting from Chechnya and the North Caucasus - she considered it to be her task to continue writing about those who otherwise had no voice.

Today, other journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers in the Russian Federation continue to face attacks, threats and intimidation, including death threats. Many prefer not to talk about it

publicly, but in recent years Amnesty International has received credible information from several human rights defenders and journalists about serious threats made against them in order to silence them. Such threats have come from both state and non-state actors.

One of those under threat, journalist Fatima Tlisova, wrote about the situation in the North Caucasus for several news agencies. She said at a press conference in Washington earlier this year that she feared there had been attempts to poison her while she was living in Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria. In another case, that of Magomed Mutsolgov (a human rights defender from Ingushetia), a website operated from the Republic of Ingushetia published a letter earlier this year by someone who claimed he had overheard conversations among members of the law enforcement agencies in which they discussed the need to halt, by any possible means, the work of Magomed Mutsolgov. Magomed Mutsolgov is the head of the human rights organization MASHR which supports relatives of persons who have been subjected to enforced disappearance as well as victims of torture. Shortly after this letter was carried on the website, he told Amnesty International that he was sure he was followed.

Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to clearly and unequivocally speak out in defence of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders who talk openly about the human rights situation in the Russian Federation.

Amnesty International calls on Federal and Chechen authorities to take substantive measures to enable independent monitors and journalists, including foreign journalists, to report from Chechnya without fear of reprisals.

Furthermore, Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to protect journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers by vigorously investigating allegations of attacks on journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers, including, but not limited to, the murder of Anna Politkovskaya. Those who are found responsible for such crimes, including those who ordered or masterminded the attacks, should be brought to justice without delay.