

Mr. Matti Vanhanen  
Prime Minister of Finland  
Presidency of the European Union

Brussels, 18 October 2006  
Ref. B589

Dear Mr. Vanhanen,

**Subject: Human Rights violations in the Russian Federation**

In light of your forthcoming meeting with President Putin during the informal EU Heads of State and Government meeting, Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to the serious and persistent human rights violations, which are continuing in the Russian Federation. These are problems, which the EU in accordance with its own human rights guidelines should address in meetings with the Russian authorities. Because of their seriousness, EU's credibility is at stake if they are not addressed at the highest possible level i.e. in you meetings with President Putin in Lahti and later in November at the EU-Russia summit in Helsinki.

**1 . Gross infringements on the freedom of association**

As you are aware, a new law on public associations and non-profit organisations came into force in April this year. The new law and its regulations provide for excessive powers of supervision and impose strict control over foreign NGOs. In addition it opens the possibility to close down NGOs, an option which was applied in the case of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, which received a court-order on 13 October 2006 to close down within two months.

***Amnesty International asks that you use the opportunity to reiterate the EU's concern about these infringements on freedom of association by closing NGOs and to call for the NGO law and its implementing regulations to be remedied. We would hope that President Putin will be left in no doubt about the EU's determination to closely monitor how the NGO law is being implemented.***

**2. Disturbing developments related to freedom of expression**

The slaying of Anna Politkovskaya at the hands of unknown assailants brought the fragile state of freedom of expression in Russia to the forefront of the world's attention with tragic clarity. Amnesty International noted with satisfaction the strong and immediate response of the Finnish Presidency. Another example is the case of Stanislav Dmitrievskii who was convicted on 3 February this year on race-hate charges for publishing non-violent articles by Chechen separatist leaders. In Amnesty International's view he was convicted for exercising his freedom of expression.

***Amnesty International would like you to reiterate to President Putin the EU's call for a full and thorough investigation into the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya and ask for the immediate lifting of the conviction of Mr. Stanislav Dmitrievskii.***

### 3. Torture during counter-terrorism operations

Amnesty International understands and appreciates the governments' obligation to protect its citizens in face of terrorist threats. However, we are of the opinion that these threats must be met within the parameters set by international human rights obligations. We are therefore greatly disturbed by the increasing reports from Russia of arbitrary detention and torture of people who are detained in connection with terrorism-related crimes. Individuals are held incommunicado, at unofficial places of detention where they are subjected to torture to "prepare them" to sign testimonies. In some cases, people simply disappear.

***Amnesty International would like you to remind President Putin about Russia's obligation under international human rights treaties to protect the rights of those in detention not to be subjected to torture or ill-treatment and to have full access to legal counsel.***

For further details on each of these topics and also some background on racist violence and violence against women, please find attached for your information our latest briefing note on Human rights violations in the Russian Federation.

We look forward to hearing from you as to the outcome of your deliberations with the Russian President.

With best regards,



Dick Oosting  
Director  
Amnesty International EU office



Frank Johansson  
Director  
Amnesty International Finland