

Angela Merkel
Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
Presidency of the European Union

Brussels, 7 May 2007
Ref: B 663

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

Subject: EU-Russia Summit: human rights violations in the Russian Federation.

In light of the upcoming EU-Russia Summit, Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in the Russian Federation. Amnesty International already expressed its concerns before the human rights consultations with Russia that took place earlier this month and appreciates the effort made by the German Presidency to address these problems.

However, Amnesty International hopes that you may use your meeting with President Putin to raise the issue of human rights once again. Foremost is the increasing infringement on the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression in Russia. As a member of the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, the Russian Federation has undertaken to respect freedom of speech and of assembly. Russia is clearly not fulfilling its obligations as space for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and assembly is diminishing. Bans on demonstrations are not always legitimate or proportionate restrictions of freedom of assembly. The recent events in Moscow and St Petersburg, the arrest of accredited journalists and the attacks on them on the fringes of the demonstrations along with excessive use of force by the security forces constitute a highly worrying trend.

Civil society organisations, human rights defenders and journalists face increased pressure and are subjected to administrative harassment to prevent them from doing their work and expressing their ideas. Moreover, the new legal provisions and regulations brought into law in April 2006 have impeded the work of Russians and foreign NGOs. Amnesty International documented that a number of NGOs have been prevented from undertaking some of their activities due to the strict demands put on them under the new law. Such restrictions range from being fined for holding a meeting in a public place with the participation of members of foreign NGOs to having to divert human resources to additional administrative tasks, thereby being unable to undertake core activities. Journalists are intimidated and in some cases attacked or killed. Those reporting from the North Caucasus, including Chechnya are particularly at risk.

Amnesty International asks that you reiterate the concerns of the European Union, by calling upon President Putin to:

- *investigate thoroughly and impartially all reports of police ill-treatment during political demonstrations in Moscow and St Petersburg on 14 and 15 April 2007;*
- *amend the law on Non-Governmental Organisations and to introduce safeguards to protect NGOs from arbitrary restrictions on their legal work; and*
- *fulfil the Russian Federation's commitments as a member of various international organisations to protect and promote human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.*

On behalf of Amnesty International we look forward to hearing from you with regard to your discussions with President Putin.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting
Director
Amnesty International EU Office



Barbara Lochbihler
Secretary General
Amnesty International Germany

Cc: Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External relations and European Neighbourhood Policy
Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security policy