

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

MEDIA ADVISORY

9 October 2014

Civil activists are not spies, President Putin

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the world are joining together to call on Russian President Vladimir Putin to repeal the “foreign agents” law and to guarantee that NGOs in Russia are able to work without hindrance, harassment, stigmatisation or reprisals.

Under the “foreign agents” law NGOs and their leaders are effectively labelled spies. After lengthy court hearings some have been forced to close, with prohibitive fines imposed on both the organisations and their leaders.

“NGOs are essential to a healthy functioning society. They provide much needed services to the public and help keep officials accountable. NGOs are instrumental in lobbying and campaigning to improve government policies in the interests of the people. They are anything but ‘foreign agents’, said Sergei Nikitin, Director of Amnesty International’s Moscow Office.

More than a dozen leading Russian rights groups have already been branded by the Ministry of Justice as “foreign agents”. Many more face the same fate.

Around 70 NGOs from all over the world, including Bulgaria, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and the UK have signed an [open letter](#) and more will follow before it is handed to the office of the Russian president on 21 November 2014.

“President Putin must hear the voices of civil society. It is in the interest of both the Russian people and the Russian authorities to engage in a meaningful dialogue with civil society and benefit from their expertise,” Sergei Nikitin said.

See also:

[*Violation of the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly in Russia*](#)

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