

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Russian Federation: Human rights activist murdered

Amnesty International strongly condemns today's murder of Natalia Estemirova, a leading human rights activist working in the North Caucasus region and a long-standing friend of the organization.

"Natalia Estemirova's murder is a consequence of the impunity that has been allowed to persist by the Russian and Chechen authorities," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"Human rights violations in Russia, and especially in the North Caucasus, can no longer be ignored. And those who stand up for human rights need protection."

"The terrible tragedy of the killing of Natalia Estemirova is a crime that should be denounced by the authorities and every effort must be made to bring those responsible to justice. It is yet another attempt to try to gag civil society in Russia and highlights the instability in the region."

"Natalia Estemirova was a most courageous and inspiring woman who never tired of defending the human rights of others. She was a truly exceptional person and a friend to many of us," said Irene Khan.

"We are shocked and saddened by the news of her death and wish to express our deepest sympathy for the family of Natalia Estemirova, for her friends and for her colleagues."

Natalia Estemirova, one of the leading members of the Russian human rights NGO Memorial in Grozny, Chechnya, was abducted this morning at around 8.30 am local time. She was dragged into a white car (VAZ-2107) and driven off in an unknown direction. According to witnesses, Natalia Estemirova managed to shout out that she was being abducted.

Later today, the Russian news agency Itar-TASS reported that her body had been found in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia with gunshot wounds.

Natalia Estemirova's work was crucial in documenting human rights violations in the region, such as torture and other ill-treatment, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances, since the start of the second Chechnya war in 2000. She also devoted herself to providing assistance to displaced people and other socially disadvantaged groups. No one has claimed responsibility, but colleagues believe she was killed for her human rights activities.

Her work has been recognized both at home and internationally by numerous awards, including the Robert Schuman medal of the European Parliament (2005), the Right Livelihood Award of the Swedish Parliament (2004 - the so-called Alternative Nobel Peace Prize), and she was the first recipient of the Anna Politkovskaya Award (2007).

The murder of Natalia Estemirova sheds further light on the precarious circumstances in which human rights defenders work in the Russian Federation. It follows the killings earlier this year of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, both close friends and colleagues of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who herself was murdered in 2006.

Amnesty International calls for an end to impunity for the murder of human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers in Russia.

Background

In April this year the Russian authorities announced the end of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Chechnya. However, in the North Caucasus in recent months there have been a number of high-profile killings amid signs that tensions in the region are on the rise.

In a report published earlier this month, [*Rule without law: Human rights violations in the North Caucasus*](#), Amnesty International called for full accountability for the human rights violations that have taken place as the only way to bring about real stability and a return to civil peace in Chechnya and the North Caucasus.

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