

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### Russian Federation: Flaws in the law on NGOs more and more visible

More than a year after the law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was passed in the Russian Federation, the implementation of the law reveals that changes to it are urgently needed. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Russian authorities to amend the law as it establishes limits on the freedom of expression and assembly. During a meeting in July 2006 with heads of international leading NGOs, including Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised to review the implementation of the law.

The most recent example of the threat of closure of the NGO Youth Human Rights Movement (YHRM) is a clear example of the flaws in the law's implementation. The YHRM learned only in August 2007 that two months earlier a district court in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod had ordered that the YHRM be taken off the register for recognized NGOs of the Federal Registration Service (FRS), as they had allegedly failed to provide reports about their activities to the regional department of the FRS.

The regional FRS branch therefore claimed that the YHRM was inactive and should be taken off the register. Information about legal procedures against the NGO was reportedly sent to an address under which the organization has not been registered for three years, and therefore its representatives were unaware of the attempts to take off the NGO from the register until earlier this week. As the order to close the NGO was issued *in absentia*, the organization has asked the court to extend the period in which it can appeal against the decision. Dmitrii Makarov, coordinator for the legal programme of the NGO, is optimistic that such an extension will be granted. The YHRM may then have to demonstrate that it is an active organization in order to rebut the allegations from the FRS. Dmitrii Makarov told Amnesty International that the organization has, in line with the law, provided all necessary documents about its many activities to the main central office of the FRS in Moscow, rather than the regional branch. He is hopeful that the case of YHRM will help to raise awareness about the situation of many other NGOs which suffer from the restrictive and unreasonable demands of the law.

#### Background

According to official information received by Amnesty International, changes to the law may be discussed during a forthcoming session of the Russian parliament later this year. However, Amnesty International is concerned that in the meantime, Russian and international NGOs continue to suffer the consequences of the implementation of a law which was flawed right from the beginning.

Amnesty International will continue to monitor developments around this and other NGOs and will continue to call for changes to the law on NGOs.

In line with the law on NGOs, which was signed by Russian President Putin in January 2006, an organization registered as an international NGO has to provide details about its activities and finances to the main central office of the FRS in Moscow. The Youth Human Rights Movement, which was founded in 1998, registered in 2004 as an international organization, and at the same time informed the authorities about a new address. The YHRM is an international organization accredited among others with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Among its many activities it takes part in worldwide campaigns against the death penalty, and with other NGOs in the Russian Federation it is active for the protection of the right to freedom of assembly and association. Amnesty International has cooperated with the YHRM many times in recent years.

