



BRIEFING ON HUMAN RIGHTS

SITUATION IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

(Bern/London, May 2017)

While Amnesty International welcomes the visit of a Parliamentary Delegation of the Swiss National Council to Russia, the organization urges the participants to use this opportunity to highlight the dire human rights situation in Russia. Amnesty International claims the Russian authorities to be responsible for a staggering list of human rights violations, and observes that the space for human rights in Russia has been shrinking considerably in recent years. The organization itself has experienced a restriction of its own working space, when its long-time offices in Moscow were closed down by the authorities, in November 2016. After lengthy talks with the authorities, the office could be reopened two weeks later. The incident showed, however, that even the presence of Amnesty International in Russia cannot be taken for granted anymore.

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

In the first few months of 2017, Russia has seen a disturbing new surge in political repression, resulting from a raft of laws passed last year which further limit the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. More than 1,000 peaceful demonstrators were arrested in Moscow alone and hundreds were arrested in other cities on 26 March, following one of the largest protests held in Russia in recent years. Many protesters were fined by the courts or sentenced to several days of administrative detention. At least 14 journalists were arbitrarily detained during the rallies. Police also raided the offices of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, a civil society group, and 12 staff members were put behind bars by a court on spurious charges. These are only the most recent cases of the restriction of freedom of expression, association and assembly. They give further concerns regarding the respect for fair trial standards.

Weitere Informationen auf Deutsch: <https://www.amnesty.ch/de/laender/europa-zentralasien/russland/dok/2017/oppositionsfuehrer-nawalny-und-hunderte-demonstranten-verhaftet>

Plus d'informations en français: <https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/europe-asie-centrale/russie/docs/2017/alexei-navalny-emprisonne>

PERSECUTION OF GAY MEN IN CHECHNYA

According to credible sources, more than 100 gay men in Chechnya have been rounded up, detained, tortured and even murdered in an apparently coordinated campaign. These alarming **abductions and killings** follow a similar pattern to **enforced disappearances** which have been documented in hundreds of cases over the years in Chechnya and other republics in Russia's North Caucasus. Virtually none of these have been effectively investigated.

Weitere Informationen auf Deutsch: <https://www.amnesty.ch/de/laender/europa-zentralasien/russland/dok/2017/schwule-maenner-entfuehrt-und-umgebracht>

Plus d'informations en français: <https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/europe-asie-centrale/russie/docs/2017/enleves-tortures-ou-tues-en-raison-de-leur-homosexualite>

SETBACK IN FIGHT AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In February 2017, President Putin signed a legal reform that decriminalizes some forms of domestic violence, and puts women who suffer domestic violence at greater risk. While Russia is a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the country is far behind global developments to protect victims of domestic violence, having very scarce measures in place such as government-funded shelters, effective practices of protection orders or police officers trained in how to respond to reports about abuse and protect victims. Russian authorities must scrap this abusive legislation and put together a comprehensive package of measures to address the vast scale of domestic violence.

SHRINKING SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

While the above mentioned restrictions of freedom of expression and assembly have serious consequences on the working space of most human rights defenders, their situation has become even more dire since the adoption of the so-called “**foreign agents**” law in November 2012. More than a hundred civil society organizations have been labelled as „foreign agent“ and as a result have seen their funding shrink, their reputations tarnished, and their staff intimidated. Furthermore, human rights defenders increasingly face fines or criminal prosecution because of their activities, as the case of renowned human rights defender Valentina Cherevatenko shows: in June 2016, the founder and Chair of *the Women of the Don Union* became the first person to be criminally prosecuted for violation of the “foreign agents” law. The criminal case against her is still ongoing as the investigation has been extended until the end of May. Her case may go to court soon.

More recently, on 26 April 2017, three NGOs founded by the former prisoner of conscience **Mikhail Khodorkovsky** were designated as “undesirable” by Russia's Prosecutor General's Office. The decree effectively bans the UK-registered *Open Russia* and its sister organization *Open Russia Civic Movement* and outlaws any association with them. The third group blacklisted on the same day is the US-based *Institute of Modern Russia*. This is the first time the authorities ban a civil society group that was founded by Russians and operates only in Russia.

Weitere Informationen auf Deutsch: <https://www.amnesty.ch/de/laender/europa-zentralasien/russland/dok/2016/4-jahre-gesetz-auslaendische-agenten>

Plus d'informations en français: <https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/europe-asie-centrale/russie/docs/2016/quatre-ans-apres-loi-sur-les-agents-de-l-etranger>

Another common form of attack against human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers committed by pro-government individuals and groups is harassment starting from “innocent” egging or cake-throwing to life threatening attacks (e.g. attack against members of Joint Mobile Group in June 2015:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/1802/2015/en/>. The most recent victim of such an attack is opposition leader **Alexei Nawalny** who has lost his sight in one eye after an attack with an anti-septic.

Whilst harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders constitute in themselves a serious human rights violation, it has been, in some cases, only a step ahead of murder. The murder of Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova are only two out of numerous cases of **unlawful killings of human rights defenders** Amnesty International has documented. While in the first one at least partial justice has been achieved, the second one is not being investigated, and eight years on no justice has been achieved whatsoever.

SWISS GUIDELINES ON THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Switzerland can and should play an important role in protecting human rights and the brave people who defend them in Russia by making use of the Swiss Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, published by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in 2013. The Guidelines provide a set of proven practices in working with human rights defenders and are in particular designed to provide the Swiss representations with a uniform approach to this aspect of their work.