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PRESS RELEASE

Russia: Chechen Human Rights Advocate Remembered

On 15 July 2009, Natalia Estemirova, a Chechen human rights activist and representative of the Memorial Human Rights Centre in Grozny, was abducted and murdered. On the anniversary of her death ARTICLE 19 commemorates her work and reiterates calls for bringing those who committed and instigated her murder to justice.

Estemirova was abducted outside her home in Grozny, Chechnya, according to the reports of Russian officials, her body was later found near Nazran, the capital of neighbouring Ingushetia, showing signs of a violent death. Estemirova had worked at the Memorial Human Rights Centre since 2000, on a number of sensitive cases documenting human rights abuses in Chechnya. A well known and respected defender of human rights, she had been awarded the Anna Politkovskaya Award by RAW [Reach all Women] in WAR, an organisation supporting women in armed conflicts, as well as the European Parliament's Robert Schuman medal in 2005.

The lack of resolution in Estemirova's case, following a year of stifled investigation, highlights the failure of the Russian government to abide by international human rights laws, which stipulate that the state should protect its populace and create an environment which encourages pluralism and political debate. It also violates a positive obligation of the Russian government to conduct a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the killing. Instead, a climate of impunity pervades in Russia, allowing such murders to continue and go unaccounted for.

ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Government of the Russian Federation to:

- Ensure that the ongoing investigation into Estemirova's murder pursues all avenues in an impartial, open and full enquiry.
- Bring both the perpetrators and instigators of this murder to justice.
- Take all measures necessary to create a safe and secure environment for human rights defenders to do their work without fear or harassment.

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