



For immediate release - 19 July 2007

## **Russia: Amendments to Extremism Legislation further Threatens Freedom of Expression**

**ARTICLE 19 today issued the statement *Russia: Continued Violations of the Right to Free Expression*. The statement is launched while President Vladimir Putin considers signing new amendments to extremism legislation already approved by the Russian Parliament, which will further restrict freedom of expression.**

ARTICLE 19's monitoring shows that freedom expression is steadily deteriorating in the Russian Federation (Russia). Public officials, including those at the highest level of the government, refuse to view the media as an independent critic and often regard it as a subordinate body aimed at furthering certain political goals. Media outlets who dare to voice independent opinions are silenced.

Cases outlined in the statement include:

- Killing of journalists, and the absence of subsequent thorough and impartial investigations;
- Suppression of opposition groups and peaceful demonstrations;
- Closure and harassment of NGOs;
- Criminal sentences in freedom of expression cases;
- Attacks on minorities, whether religious, sexual or ethnic.

Just this month, the Russian Parliament adopted amendments to extremism legislation which the President has to either sign or veto by 25 July. The amendments provide for:

- An expansion of the definition of extremism, to include 'hatred or hostility towards any social group' – with no definition of 'social group' and punishable with imprisonment for up to five years;
- New regulations on the distribution of the 'extremist materials' included in a 'federal list', to be compiled by the authorities - punishable with administrative arrest and confiscation of said materials.

These instances are clear violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights, to which Russia is a party and which - in Article 19 and Article 10 respectively - guarantee the right to freedom of expression. A pluralistic, open and diverse environment does not currently exist in Russia: while the media, journalists, opposition groups are silenced, the Russian public is deprived of its right to information and debate on matters of public importance.

The statement provides detailed recommendations to the Russian authorities to amend its law and practice for compliance with its responsibilities under international law.

*ARTICLE 19 is an independent non-profit organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.*

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- Read the full statement at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/russia-foe-violations.pdf>
- The law ‘On changes to several legal acts of the Russian Federation to enhance the counteracting of extremist activities’. The law was voted in its third (and final) reading by the lower house on 6 July and by the upper house on 11 July. President Vladimir Putin will either sign or veto the law by 25 July; he had not done either by 19 July. If signed, the law will amend the Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity, the Administrative Code, the Criminal Code and the Law on Surveillance. The Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity was also amended in mid-2006.
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