

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

L'OBSERVATOIRE
pour la Protection des Défenseurs
des Droits de l'Homme

EL OBSERVATORIO
para la Protección de los Defensores
de Derechos Humanos

PRESS RELEASE

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: Call for effective measures to protect human rights defenders and put an end to impunity

Paris-Geneva, February 18, 2009. *The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, call for immediate independent and impartial investigations into the threats against - and assassinations of - human rights defenders in the Russian Federation.*

The Observatory is concerned by the multiplication of physical and verbal attacks in the Russian Federation. On January 19, 2009, Mr. **Stanislav Markelov**, an eminent lawyer committed in the fight against impunity and arbitrariness on the whole Russian territory, was shot dead. Ms. **Anastassia Babourova**, a free lance journalist working for the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper, was injured and died later in hospital. Mr. Markelov had already been attacked in the past, in particular in 2004, and these attacks would not have been properly investigated.

Three weeks after the death of Mr. Markelov, Ms. **Galina Kozhevnikova**, Deputy Director of the SOVA Centre, received death threats by email in Moscow, a few days after the announcement of the upcoming presentation of a report on radical nationalism. The Observatory subsequently contacted the Russian authorities and the inter-governmental organisations working on Russia, given the seriousness of these threats and the level of detail provided in the email, in which its authors informed Ms. Kozhevnikova that it was time for her to "join" Mr. Markelov and Mr. **Nikolai Girenko**, an anti-racism activist, who was also shot dead in 2004, and in which they argued, inter alia, that "*the assassination of journalists, lawyers and all kind of "experts" receive[d] much more attention than the murders of Armenian or Dagestani students*", which had led its authors to decide to "*target such people more and more*".

The Observatory points out that in a context where threats against human rights defenders sometimes lead to their death, such threats have to be considered in an immediate manner and with the utmost seriousness. To that extent, independent and impartial investigations have to be opened in the shortest delays, so that the authors of threats be quickly identified, brought before a competent and impartial tribunal and sanctioned according to law.

The Observatory also insists on the utmost importance to provide human rights defenders threatened with effective protection, so that their physical and psychological integrity be guaranteed in all circumstances, in conformity with the [1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#), with the [Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Council of Europe action to improve the protection of human rights defenders and promote their activities](#), and with the 2007 Resolution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions.

The Observatory calls upon the Commissioner on Human Rights of the Council of Europe to raise, amongst others, the question of effective and prompt investigations into the assassinations of Mr. Markelov and Ms. Babourova, as well as into the death threats against Ms. Kozhevnikova on the occasion of his next visit to the Russian Federation.

The Observatory more generally urges the Russian authorities to to launch a full and impartial investigation into above-mentioned assassinations and death threats, and finally bring those responsible to justice, as well as to ensure that an end be put against all acts of harassment or attacks against human rights defenders in the country.

For further information, please contact:

OMCT : Delphine Reculeau, + 41 22 809 49 39

FIDH : Gael Grilhot, + 33 1 43 55 25 18

Un programme de la FIDH et de l'OMCT - A FIDH and OMCT venture - Un programa de la FIDH y de la OMCT

fidh

International Federation For Human Rights
17, Passage de la Main d'Or
75 011 Paris, France

OMCT
SOS-Torture Network

World Organisation Against Torture
Case postale 21 - 8 rue du Vieux-Billard
1211 Genève 8, Switzerland