



CHECHNYA PEACE FORUM

PRESS STATEMENT

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KREMLIN TREASON BILL SIGNALS YET ANOTHER ATTACK ON NGO'S AND RUSSIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Commenting on the Kremlin's bill to widen the legal parameters of treason to strengthen its ability to prosecute those who cooperate with international rights groups, Ivar Amundsen, Director of the Chechnya Peace Forum, said:

"This bill is yet another attempt to rule behind closed doors and hamper the ability of international NGO's to function in Russia and expose the endemic abuses perpetrated by the Kremlin."

"Laws which ease the ability of the state to prosecute those who cooperate with international NGO's are intended to further intimidate Russian citizens from speaking out and will have a serious impact on Russian democracy."

"Political freedoms have already been mauled by the Putin machine, serving as a reminder that a managed democracy really is no democracy at all."

"Sadly, this bill is everything we have come to expect from a Putin-led Kremlin. The continual slide into authoritarianism is turning into a rapid descent as the financial crisis raises fears among Putin and his cronies that their authority, and their wallets, will come under threat."

"The provision for defining any attempt to affect Russia's 'territorial integrity' as treason is a thinly veiled assault on the rights of the democratic opposition movements – in Chechnya in particular – to advocate independence or even autonomy from a Kremlin autocracy that has terrorised them."

"If damaging 'constitutional order' is a barometer for treason, then the Kremlin should look in its own halls. Extending the presidential term is the constitutional threat, not the besieged liberal forces that are trying to hold the Kremlin to account for its actions."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Ivar Amundsen is Director of the Chechnya Peace Forum, a human rights organisation based in London which seeks to promote the cause of democracy and human rights in Chechnya by bringing the humanitarian crisis there to greater international attention.
2. A letter initiated by the Chechnya Peace Forum was published in *The Guardian* on May 7 2008 calling for incoming President Medvedev to use his tenure to restore peace and justice to Chechnya. The letter was signed by more than 100 members of Britain's political and cultural elite. Signatories included Andrew Motion, John le Carre, Ken Loach, Lord Giddens, A.C. Grayling, Benjamin Zephaniah, André Glucksmann and Helena Kennedy. It can be seen online here:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/may/07/russia.chechnya>.