



NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS REPRESSION OF NGOs IN RUSSIA

Brussels/Moscow, 22 February 2008. The Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG) and Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) today published a report examining the impact of the so-called Russian NGO law, which introduced significant changes to existing legislation on NGOs when it entered into force in April 2006. The 32-page report, which is entitled *Control and Punishment: Human Rights Implications of Russian Legislation on NGOs*, demonstrates how the NGO law has become a tool of repression against civil society in Russia.

The provisions of the NGO law are vaguely and ambiguously worded and grant authorities broad and discretionary powers to make decisions about the status of NGOs, control and interfere with their activities and impose sanctions for alleged violations. The law has proven to be open to arbitrary and selective implementation and has been used to impede, restrict and punish legitimate NGO activities. It has seriously constrained the day-to-day work of NGOs and contributed to growing insecurity and vulnerability of Russian civil society.

Major concerns highlighted by the report include:

- *A growing number of NGOs have been refused registration as legal entities on discretionary grounds, such as questionable objections to the wording of their charters.*
- *NGOs have had to invest considerable time and money to comply with new onerous requirements for reporting to authorities about their activities and funding, which has drained resources from their regular activities, such as charity work or assistance to victims of human rights violations. Many organizations have simply been overwhelmed by the requirements and have not had capacity to complete the necessary paperwork.*
- *Across the country, NGOs have been subject to intrusive and lengthy inspections of their activities, in the course of which their internal dealings have been closely scrutinized. The work of these organizations has been crippled for up to several months and, in the end, they have frequently received warnings for minor, technical violations, which have placed them at the risk of further sanctions.*
- *Thousands of NGOs have been warned or faced court cases for termination of their legal status because of alleged failures to submit required information to authorities. In many cases, courts have approved requests for de-registration of NGOs although the organizations have been known to be actively operating and no evidence has been presented to support allegations of reporting violations.*

The report includes a 2-page summary and makes a number of recommendations to Russian authorities, which international actors are encouraged to bring up in their interactions with the Russian government. The report is attached.

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