



## The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders unites 30 human rights NGOs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Network seeks to facilitate creation of a safer and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the South Caucasus and to strengthen their voices in the region and internationally.

# The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders Condemns the murder of Natalia Estemirova

July 17, 2009

***The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders* strongly condemns the murder of a prominent human rights defender Natalia Estemirova. On the international day of justice, July 17, the Network members call upon the Russian authorities to conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation of this case and previous murders of human rights defenders in the country. The Network members also call upon the Russian authorities to further ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders in their country.**

On July 15, 2009 Natalia Estemirova was abducted by four men near her home in Grozny, the capital of Chechen Republic. Hours later, Russian officials announced that her body had been found in Ingushetia with gunshot wounds in the head and chest.

Natalia Estemirova, from the Russian human rights organization "*Memorial*", was one of the leading human rights defenders in the Northern Caucasus. She played a crucial role in exposing abuses committed by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's militia and Russian forces in Chechnya. Natalia Estemirova's work in defence of human rights has been acknowledged with international awards. She was the first receiver of the Anna Politkovskaya Award (2007), winner of the Prize of the Swedish Parliament "Right to Existence" (2004) and European Parliament's Robert Schumann Medal (2005).

Recently Estemirova was involved in investigating crimes of torture, executions and disappearances of people in the Chechen Republic. Authorities of the Chechen Republic have often expressed their discontent with her work.

The murder of Estemirova is not the first case of killing a human rights defender in Russia. On October 7, 2006 the prominent journalist [Anna Politkovskaya](#) was murdered in Moscow and on January 19, 2009 the human rights lawyer [Stanislav Markelov](#) and the journalist [Anastasia Baburova](#) were murdered in Moscow. None of these cases have been thoroughly and impartially investigated by the authorities.

Ongoing impunity for the killings of human rights defenders and the murder of Natalia Estemirova is a pressing reminder to all of us that lives and physical security of human rights defenders are still in danger in many parts of the world, including the Caucasus. This climate of impunity undermines protection and respect for human rights and freedoms of each and every individual and is unacceptable.

***The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders* calls upon the Russian authorities to:**

- conduct immediate, thorough and impartial investigation on the case of murder of Natalia Estemirova and in this respect investigate the responsibility of the President of Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov;
- conduct thorough and impartial investigations in murders of Anna Politkovskaya, Stanislav Markelov and Anastasia Baburova and bring those responsible to justice;

Creation of South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders is supported by the European Union.

Network is coordinated by Human Rights Center (Georgia), Armenian Helsinki Association (Armenia) and Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan).

Human Rights House Foundation (Oslo, Norway) is the international partner of the Network.

- abide by human rights obligations enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian and international human rights instruments which Russia has committed to uphold;
- ensure safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the country as stated in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders  
***The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders calls upon international actors to:***
  - condemn the murder of Natalia Estemirova and urge Russian authorities to conduct the immediate, thorough and impartial investigation of the case
  - call upon Russian authorities to ensure safety and security of human rights defenders in the Russian Federation.

Signed by the members of the Network:

### **Azerbaijan**

Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety,  
 Human Rights Center,  
 International Student Cooperation,  
 Public Association for Assistance for Free Economy,  
 Association for the Protection of Women's Rights in Azerbaijan after D. Aliyeva,  
 Democracy and HR Resource Centre Public Union (Sungait),  
 Legal Education Society,  
 Society for Humanitarian Research,  
 Institute for Peace and Democracy,  
 Media Rights Institute,  
 Election Monitoring and Education Center

### **Georgia**

Human Rights Center (HRIDC),  
 Center for the protection the constitutional rights,  
 Anti-violence Network of Georgia (AVNG),  
 Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights,  
 Article 42 of the Constitutions,  
 Multinational Georgia,  
 Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims,  
 Studio Reporter,  
 Caucasian Center for Conflict and Human Rights,  
 Inclusive

### **Armenia**

Armenian Helsinki Association  
 Helsinki Assembly, Vanadzor  
 Socioscope  
 Democracy Today  
 Armenian Helsinki Assembly, Yerevan  
 Jurists against Torture  
 Women's Resource Center Armenia  
 Vernatun- Political Prisoners' Wives  
 Asparez, Journalist Club, Gyumri region  
 Public Information and Need of Knowledge (PINK)  
 South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders