



Human Rights Watch Statement

Item 6: UPR Outcome Report on Russia

10 June 2009

Human Rights Watch welcomes the UPR process on Russia as an important opportunity to highlight some of the most pressing human rights concerns that continue to mar the Russian government's human rights record, and for it to commit to concrete, urgently-needed human rights reforms to address them.

We note the significant number of states that used the UPR process on Russia to send a strong and unequivocal message about the necessity of concrete and meaningful human rights improvements, and recommend specific steps toward that end.

A key concern raised during the UPR process was the **hostile and deteriorating environment for Russia's civil society, including threats and attacks on human rights defenders and journalists.** Concerns were also raised about the **restrictive law on NGOs adopted in 2006, which provides for excessive government oversight and interference, and burdens NGOs in Russia with unreasonable bureaucratic requirements.** Experts including the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders have recommended that this law be amended to meet international standards. Many of Russia's peers used the UPR to make the same call.

We would have expected Russia to seize the opportunity of the UPR to expressly commit to specific steps to ensure that civil society can operate without undue government interference—all the more so in light of the welcome process now under way in Russia initiated by President Medvedev to review the NGO law with a view to amending it. We urge the government to substantially revise the law as well as condemn unequivocally attacks on human rights defenders and journalists, and ensure such crimes are investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Ongoing abuses in Chechnya and the broader North Caucasus, and the persisting impunity for them constituted another area of core concern that was well reflected in the UPR. Russia was urged to establish meaningful and accessible accountability mechanisms, ensuring they are transparent and that those responsible are brought to justice; full implementation of the now more than 100 rulings by the European Court of Human Rights finding Russia responsible for serious violations in Chechnya; and ratification of Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention rendering the court more effective by, among other things, easing its workload, which Russia is the only Council of Europe member to block.

Regrettably, rather than making clear its firm determination to address these very valid and pressing concerns, the Russian government chose to ignore them.

Among the most frequently raised concerns was Russia's failure to grant access to the country for UN special procedures, particularly the Special Rapporteur on torture who was compelled to cancel his long-awaited visit, including to the North Caucasus, in October 2006 at the last minute following the Russian government's refusal to grant him unimpeded access and confidential interviews with detainees, claiming that doing so would violate Russian federal law. Nearly three years later, the Special Rapporteur is still awaiting Russia's agreement to a visit in full accordance with the mandate's well-established terms of reference. So are no fewer than ten other special procedures who all have pending requests to visit Russia.

Human Rights Watch regrets Russia's decision not to seize the opportunity of the UPR process and the recommendations made by so many of its peers to issue the required invitations and agree, as quickly as possible, on concrete dates for these visits.

Human Rights Watch urges the Russian government to reconsider its decision and to accept and implement all recommendations flowing from the UPR process, particularly in these three core areas of concern.