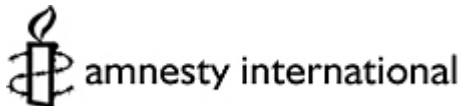


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Amnesty International Annual Report 2012 - Russian Federation

Head of state: **Dmitry Medvedev**
 Head of government: **Vladimir Putin**
 Death penalty: **abolitionist in practice**
 Population: **142.8 million**
 Life expectancy: **68.8 years**
 Under-5 mortality: **12.4 per 1,000**
 Adult literacy: **99.6 per cent**

Widespread demonstrations and arrests of hundreds of peaceful protesters followed disputed election results in December. Throughout the year, freedom of assembly had been frequently violated in the context of political, environmental, social and other protests. The media continued to operate in a restricted environment. Some members of religious minorities faced persecution, and concerns persisted about arbitrary use of anti-extremism legislation. Human rights defenders and journalists continued to experience pressure, and most investigations into past attacks showed no progress. Torture remained widely reported despite superficial police reforms. The security situation in the North Caucasus remained volatile and serious human rights abuses were committed by both armed groups and security officials.

Background

High oil prices and significant government stimulus spending enabled Russia to post relatively strong growth rates by the end of the year. However, the government's stated priorities in the area of continuing modernization, combating corruption and reforms of the criminal justice system showed few tangible results.

Following parliamentary elections marred by widespread allegations and numerous documented instances of vote rigging, the ruling United Russia party was returned to power in December with a significantly reduced share of the vote.

The results appeared to indicate a growing demand for civil and political freedoms and social and economic rights as opposed to the stability promised – and largely delivered – by the Putin/Medvedev "tandem".

The demonstrations that followed the elections grew to become the largest seen in the country since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The protests tapped into the growing civic

engagement shown through the year by individuals, interest groups and local communities around issues such as corruption, declining welfare support, police abuses and the environment.

TV and other mass media continued to follow the official line. Harsh public criticism of the authorities was mostly confined to minor print media outlets and the internet, which continued to grow in influence.

Freedom of assembly

The authorities continued to restrict freedom of assembly of critical civil society movements, but some street rallies, banned in previous years, were allowed to go ahead. However, numerous demonstrations were banned and a number of people involved in peaceful political protest were repeatedly detained, some pre-emptively (on their way to the demonstration), and frequently sentenced to administrative arrest.

Numerous spontaneous peaceful demonstrations took place across the country in the days following the disputed parliamentary elections of 4 December. More than 1,000 protesters were arrested and more than 100 sentenced to administrative arrest in proceedings that frequently violated fair trial standards. Subsequent authorized demonstrations on 10 and 24 December brought together over 50,000 protesters in Moscow and tens of thousands elsewhere in the country and passed off peacefully.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights activists continued to face harassment and attacks. Attempted pride marches and pro-LGBT rights pickets in Moscow and Saint Petersburg were banned and promptly dispersed by police.

- Sergei Udaltsov, leader of the Left Front movement, was detained more than a dozen times in Moscow while attempting to peacefully protest against government policies. He was repeatedly found guilty of administrative offences such as "disobeying lawful demands of police officers", and ended the year in detention following his arrest on 4 December for participating in a post-election protest.

Freedom of expression

State control over television broadcasting and other mass media remained strong. The importance of the internet as an alternative source of information and a forum for exchanging comment and opinion continued to grow. Although the internet continued to be relatively free from state interference, several well-known websites and blogs reporting on electoral abuses were brought down by attacks, both before and immediately after the parliamentary elections in December.

Journalists continued to face threats and physical attacks for writing about politically sensitive issues, including corruption. Such attacks were rarely effectively investigated or prosecuted.

Anti-extremism legislation was often used arbitrarily to clamp down on those critical of the authorities. In response, the Supreme Court issued a ruling in June clarifying that criticism of government officials or politicians did not constitute incitement to hatred under anti-extremism legislation. Religious minorities such as non-traditional Muslim groups or Jehovah's Witnesses continued to face persecution. Laws banning "propaganda of homosexuality among minors" were adopted in Arkhangelsk Region. In a positive development, defamation was decriminalized at the end of the year.

- On 15 December, prominent journalist Khadzhimurad Kamalov, founder and editor of the independent Dagestani weekly newspaper *Chernovik*, renowned for its critical reporting, was shot dead outside his office in Makhachkala in Dagestan. For years, *Chernovik's* staff had faced intimidation and harassment by the local authorities.
- The investigation into the violent attack on journalist Oleg Kashin in November 2010 had yielded no results at the end of the year, despite promises by the most senior Russian officials to bring the perpetrators to justice.

- Throughout the year, several followers of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi were charged with membership of the organization Nurdzhular, which is considered to be extremist and banned in Russia. Some were sentenced to imprisonment. Those charged claimed they had never heard of the organization.
- In December, Aleksandr Kalistratov, a Jehovah's Witness, was acquitted by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Altai of inciting hatred against other religious groups. He had been fined in October by a lower court for distributing leaflets about Jehovah's Witnesses.

Human rights defenders

Restrictive regulations imposed on NGOs in previous years were partly eased, and a Higher Court of Arbitration decision lifted some restrictions on foreign funding for NGOs. However, human rights defenders and journalists continued to face harassment and threats, including by officials whose wrongdoings they exposed. Most investigations into past cases of killings and physical attacks on human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers, continued to make little or no progress.

- In June, a Moscow court acquitted Oleg Orlov, head of the Human Rights Centre Memorial, of criminal slander. The Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, whom Oleg Orlov had named responsible for the murder of Natalia Estemirova, appealed against the decision, but slander was decriminalized later in the year and the charges were dropped.
- In July, a group of human rights defenders published a report on the murder of their colleague Natalia Estemirova in July 2009. The report highlighted numerous omissions and inconsistencies in the official investigation, and concluded that leads linking her killing to Chechen law enforcement officials had not been thoroughly followed up. Following its publication, the Head of the Investigation Committee promised that all possible leads in her murder would be explored, but he had not disclosed any new information by the end of the year.
- A new investigation into the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 led in June and August to the arrest of two new suspects, one for murder. Two more named suspects, including one of those acquitted in 2009, continued to serve sentences for other crimes.
- In May, a Moscow court sentenced two far-right activists, one to life and the other to 18 years' imprisonment, for the murder of lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova in January 2009.

Torture and other ill-treatment

The new law on the police, which came into force in March, introduced the formal appraisal of all officers and reduced their numbers. However, there were no substantive new provisions for strengthening the accountability of the police or to combat impunity for violations by law enforcement officials, and the law's benefits remained elusive. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment remained widespread. Allegations were seldom effectively investigated and documented injuries were often dismissed as resulting from the legitimate use of force. The successful prosecution of perpetrators was rare. The denial of adequate medical care in custody was widely reported, and was allegedly used to extract confessions. Convicted prisoners frequently reported being subjected to violence, by both prison officials and inmates, shortly after their arrival in prison.

- The trial of two police officers on charges of abuse of power, including in relation to the unlawful detention and torture of Zelimkhan Chitigov in April 2010, began in September, the first such case ever to have reached court in Ingushetia. Reportedly, several of those who had testified against the two police officers were subjected to a campaign of pressure and intimidation.
- Armen Sargsyan was detained by police in Orenburg on 18 November as a suspect in a theft case and died hours later, according to the police of acute heart failure. The family presented photos of his dead body showing head and other injuries. At

the end of the year, two police officers were under arrest in connection with the death, a further two were under investigation, and several commanding officers were disciplined.

Unfair trials

Despite ongoing attempts to improve the efficiency and independence of the judiciary, alleged political interference, corruption and the collusion of judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials continued to result in frequent reports of unfair trials.

- In May, the Moscow City Court upheld the second convictions of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev. Their repeat convictions on barely distinguishable charges from their previous trials, following deeply flawed judicial proceedings, led Amnesty International to consider them prisoners of conscience. Even allowing for their extended prison sentences, both men qualified for parole towards the end of 2011 and both were denied it.

Insecurity in the North Caucasus

The security situation in the North Caucasus remained volatile and uneven. Armed groups continued to target law enforcement and other officials, with civilians caught in the crossfire and sometimes deliberately attacked. Security operations across the region were often accompanied by serious human rights violations. There were reports of witnesses being intimidated and journalists, human rights activists and lawyers being harassed and killed.

Chechnya

The rapid post-conflict reconstruction of Chechnya continued with high levels of federal funding, though unemployment remained a problem. Activity by armed groups declined compared to other regions in the North Caucasus. Law enforcement operations continued to give rise to reports of serious human rights violations. In a letter to the human rights NGO the Interregional Committee against Torture, a senior Chechen prosecutor acknowledged that investigations into enforced disappearances in Chechnya were ineffective.

The local human rights community continued to be scarred by the unsolved killing of Natalia Estemirova in 2009 and subjected to intimidation and harassment.

- On 9 May, car mechanic Tamerlan Suleimanov was abducted at gunpoint from his workplace in Grozny by several men believed to be police officials. Eyewitnesses reportedly gave a full account of the incident to the authorities. A criminal investigation was opened on 18 May, but the case remained unsolved.
- In June, Supian Baskhanov and Magomed Alamov, both from the Interregional Committee against Torture, were detained following an officially authorized picket against torture in Grozny. They received repeated informal threats from police officials against their legitimate human rights work.
- The investigation continued into the secret detention and alleged torture of Islam Umarpashaev by police officials for four months from December 2009. His family and the official federal investigation team reportedly received direct threats from a senior Chechen police official. Local police systematically refused to co-operate with the investigation, and the suspects continued to perform police duties.
- During the course of the year, the Chechen authorities evicted over 100 families, displaced during the conflict, from temporary shelters in Grozny. Many of those evicted were given only 48 hours' notice and offered no alternative accommodation. Some were allegedly forced by armed men to sign statements that they were moving out voluntarily.

The resurgence of "Chechen traditions", actively promoted by the Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, resulted in growing gender inequalities and increased the vulnerability of women and girls to domestic and sexual violence.

- Zarema (name changed) told Amnesty International that she had been systematically subjected to sexual violence by a close male relative over several years. She married in 2010 and moved to Grozny, but her husband beat her. In June 2011, she tried to move in with her grandmother, but her brothers returned her to her husband. Zarema sought help from the Muftiyat (Muslim spiritual authority) and the government commission for resolving family conflict, but was told by both to obey her husband. In late 2011, she left home, heavily pregnant and went into hiding outside Chechnya, for fear that after the birth the husband would return her to her brothers who had promised to kill her.

Dagestan

Armed groups continued to attack security officials, members of local administrations and prominent members of the public, including mullahs preaching traditional Islam. Law enforcement operations gave rise to numerous allegations of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions and torture. Past violations in which state security officials were allegedly implicated were neither promptly investigated nor effectively prosecuted.

- On 26 August, brothers Zaur and Kamilpasha Gasanov and their father Murad were detained while working in the neighbouring territory of Stavropol. The father was released and Kamilpasha allegedly beaten and then dumped outside the city the same day. Zaur Gasanov remained in custody, suspected of being involved in an attack on the police, and was transferred to Dagestan, where he was allegedly beaten and subjected to electric shocks. He was initially prevented from meeting with his lawyer, reportedly on the pretext that the latter had a beard and therefore could be suspected of membership of an armed group.
- In May, three police officials, charged with the torture of 14-year-old Makhmud Akhmedov in July 2010, were given suspended prison sentences. The family complained in court that they had been harassed and intimidated during the investigation and court hearing, and regarded the sentences as too lenient. Following a judicial review the case was returned for additional investigation.

Ingushetia

The security situation in Ingushetia appeared to improve significantly in the early part of the year. However, attacks by armed groups and reports of serious human rights violations by security officials, particularly enforced disappearances, increased in later months.

- Ilez Gorchkhanov disappeared on 21 March during a car journey. Eyewitnesses reported seeing his abduction by some 15 armed and masked men in the centre of Nazran. The Ingushetian authorities denied any involvement in the abduction. Ilez Gorchkhanov's body was found on 19 April.
- On 23 March, some 80 protesters blocked a road in Nazran demanding the truth about Ilez Gorchkhanov's fate, and an end to enforced disappearances; they were dispersed by police. Later that day, civil society activist Magomed Khazbiev and his two brothers were arrested at their home in Nazran for "disobeying police orders" during the protest in Nazran. Magomed Khazbiev said he had been beaten; CCTV footage showed him being locked inside a car boot by masked police officers during his arrest.

Kabardino-Balkaria

In February, two attacks by armed groups on civilian targets in a tourist resort in the Elbrus area resulted in three deaths. Dozens of suspected armed group members were killed in the ensuing security operations, and many were arrested. There were repeated allegations of enforced disappearances and torture by law enforcement officials.

- Murat Bedzhiev's family reported his disappearance in Tyrnyauz on 25 June. The authorities initially denied his arrest but confirmed it two days later. A report from the local hospital confirmed that an ambulance was called three times to the

detention centre to see him between 27 and 28 June and documented bruising and serious head injuries.

North Ossetia

There were sporadic incidents of violence. Local and federal law enforcement forces based in North Ossetia launched security operations in the republic and neighbouring Ingushetia, reportedly resulting in numerous human rights violations.

- On 18 March, in the village of Chermen, teenage boys Ruslan Timurziev and Imeir Dzaurov were reportedly beaten with rifle butts by some 15 military officials in front of several witnesses. The officials had been driving through the village in two minivans; they got out and urinated near a private house. The boys had remonstrated with them, and the officials beat them so badly that they needed hospital treatment. Their parents repeatedly complained to the authorities, but to no avail.

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