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Russia

Human Rights in mourning after the assassination in Moscow of lawyer Stanislav Markelov

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Description :

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Monday January 19, 2009 Stanislav Markelov, a Russian lawyer, was shot dead with a bullet in the neck in the centre of Moscow. Anastassia Babourova, a free lance journalist working for the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, who was with him, died of her injuries in hospital. This is shattering news.

This murder comes a few days after that of Umar Israilov in Vienna. He was a witness in a case before the European Court of Human Rights that directly involves the Chechen President R. Kadyrov for acts of abduction and torture. It illustrates the systematic development of violent attacks against all those who challenge the increasing immunity prevailing in the Russian Federation. Human rights defenders, witnesses, lawyers and journalists who intervene in politically sensitive court cases are in deadly danger.

Stanislav Markelov was 34; he was known for his courage and his commitment to the rule of law all over Russia, for all Russian citizens without discrimination. The independence of justice was his obsession. Stanislav Markelov has appeared for numerous Chechen civilians, in particular the Kungaev family, whose daughter, Elsa, was killed in Chechnya by Colonel Budanov in March 2000. In 2003 Colonel Budanov received a 10 years' prison sentence, but was released conditionally on January 15, 2009. S. Markelov appealed the decision, but the Dimitrovgrad city court rejected his appeal. S. Markelov was murdered while returning from a press conference at which he had announced that he was going to fight the decision before the Russian Supreme Court, and if that failed, before an international jurisdiction.

"We are filled with consternation by the news of the assassination of Mr. Markelov. He was a lawyer of exceptional courage and abnegation, always at the side of victims of arbitrariness, constantly fighting impunity, which is one of the worst scourges of present day Russia. This assassination illustrates once again the permanent threat to human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists - all those who bear witness and fight against impunity in Russia", said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

His uncompromising commitment had already caused S. Markelov to be threatened and attacked. He was violently assaulted in April 2004, when he was attempting to obtain justice in the Zelimkhan Mourdalov case, a Chechen student who died under torture.

S. Markelov was also threatened in connexion with his defence of antifascist activists in Moscow (in particular Alexander Ryukhin, killed by neo-Nazis in April 2006), and labour and environmental activists. He appeared for Mikhail Beketov, chief editor of the Kimkinskaya Pravda newspaper, who was brutally assaulted in November 2008. He also assisted the victims of the Dubrovka theatre hostage-taking in October 2002 (the Nord-Ost case). On numerous occasions his path crossed that of Anna Politkovskaya, the Novaya Gazeta journalist who was assassinated in 2006.

FIDH wishes to offer its sincere condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Markelov.

FIDH calls on the Russian authorities to ensure that an impartial and effective investigation of this assassination be carried out, and also on all attacks and threats against human rights defenders and those who voice critical opinions, in order that the authors and those who commissioned the crime, if that be the case, be brought to justice.

FIDH demands that the security of human rights defenders, of lawyers and journalists be guaranteed, in accordance with the commitments entered into by Russia and the recommendations of numerous regional and international human rights mechanisms.

See also [urgent appeal of the Observatory for the protection of Human Rights Defenders](#)