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Human rights - Russia visit

EU Parliament chairwoman Hautala calls for better protection for human rights defenders

The 10 December is the UN International Day of Human Rights, which this year marks the 62nd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Speaking on the eve of the International Day ahead of her visit to Russia **Heidi Hautala, Finnish Green MEP and chair of the European Parliament's human rights subcommittee**, stated:

"No person should be harassed for defending basic freedoms, yet many who stand up for human rights face intimidation and suppression. There is an urgent need to defend not only the principles of human rights, but also the courageous people who work to uphold them in spite of the risks. People who have been imprisoned for exposing governments' wrongdoing and human rights violations must be released immediately."

Heidi Hautala will visit Russia on 12-15 December with the aim of visiting illegally detained prisoners in Ekaterinburg and to attend a conference on human rights that will be attended by Oleg Orlov and Sergei Kovalev, two of this year's winners of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

Itinerary

13 December. Ekaterinburg, Russia

Heidi Hautala, who is the European Parliament rapporteur on protective measures for human rights defenders in third countries, has requested to visit Aleksey Nikiforov and Aleksey Sokolov, who are currently unlawfully detained in prison.

Aleksey Nikiforov is a human rights defender and opposition activist, the first to have been sentenced (on 14 September 2009) to one year in prison purely on the grounds of "extremism" due to his political activities.

Aleksey Sokolov is a renowned Russian human rights defender who has been in pre-trial detention on suspicion of robbery since 13 May 2009. The allegation is highly dubious and its motivation has been strongly linked to his activities in the human rights field.

14-15 December 2009. Moscow, Russia

Heidi Hautala will speak on current human rights issues in Russia at the international conference: "Sakharov's ideas today". The event is organised by the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Thomas Hammarberg.

The conference will address the global agenda in promoting peace, progress and human rights.

Conference programme

16 December 2009. Strasbourg, France

The European Parliament will formally award the 2009 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Oleg Orlov, Sergei Kovalev and Lyudmila Alexeyeva, as well as Memorial and all human rights defenders in Russia.

Contact the Greens/EFA press office to receive further information and a full report on the Russia visit.

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