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Russia

Protect Khimki forest activists in their fight for justice!

Commenting on the continued attacks against Khimki forest defenders **Werner Schulz**, first Vice Chairman of the European Parliament delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, today said:

"During the past few days Russian environmental activists, peacefully demonstrating against further deforestation of the Khimki forest, have been assaulted and abused by thugs and some were even violently arrested by Russian security forces.

"I urge the Russian government to immediately comply with the protection of the integrity of its citizens and not to hinder them in their constitutional rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. I am furthermore very concerned about the allegedly unlawful actions by police and security forces against citizens.

"There are legitimate grounds for the protests against the disputed Moscow to St Petersburg motorway project. During the projects's development phase and since the start of the road's construction, there have been several violations of civil rights and environmental and procedural rules.

"Several environmental activists, journalists and residents, who have been campaigning for the preservation of the forest and who proposed alternative routes for the road, have been harassed, persecuted and in some cases brutally abused.

"I also regret that President Medvedev's promise to consult with civil society was not kept, but that he instead gave his approval to continuing the project, favouring profit over the protection of civil rights.

"The EU has rightfully drawn its conclusions and has frozen its financial support for the project. We ask all European companies participating in the project to follow this example."

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