Introduction

Civil society in Russia consists of more than 220,000 non-commercial organizations and public associations (collectively referred to as "non-governmental organizations" or "NGOs"). Russian government regulation of civil society has been much in the spotlight since January 2006, when Russia enacted the Russian Federation Law, On Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation (the 2006 Russian NGO Law). The 2006 Russian NGO Law introduced burdensome and difficult-to-meet reporting requirements for NGOs, accompanied by severe penalties for non-compliance; new and similarly burdensome registration procedures for Russian and foreign NGOs operating in Russia; and new broad powers of the registration bodies to audit the activities of NGOs. The legislation raised special concerns because it allowed for broad and restrictive interpretation. Some reporting requirements are not only difficult and costly to comply with, but also generally hard to understand, leaving room for discretion in determining whom to target when enforcing these rules.

The election of the President Medvedev, however, has fueled hope that the legal framework for civil society will improve. In June 2009, the State Duma adopted amendments to Russian Federal Law No. 7-FZ of January 12, 1996, “On Non-Commercial Organizations” (NGO Law)[1] that came into force on August 1, 2009.[2] These amendments make a number of changes, including the following:

- Small non-commercial organizations (NCOs) that do not receive foreign funding and have no foreign founders are exempt from formal reporting of annual revenue totaling less than 3 million rubles, or approximately US $100,000;
- All NCOs may make required reports on their activities publicly available by either posting the reports on their web site or publishing the report in selected media;
- Mandatory government audits of NCOs no longer take place annually, but rather every three years -- the same as for commercial enterprises;
- If an NCO does not submit all of the documents required for registration or if there are mistakes in the submitted documents, in lieu of an automatic denial of registration, the registration process may be suspended for up to three months, until the applicant completes or corrects the application. The registration body will proceed with registering an NCO once the application file is complete.
- In considering a registration application, the registration body may only request documents specified in the law; and
- Refusal to register a foreign NCO representative office may no longer be based on criteria such as "threats to unique character, cultural heritage, or national interests of the Russian Federation." These criteria have been removed from the law.


### At a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Forms</th>
<th>Non-commercial organizations, public associations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registration Body</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Number</td>
<td>Of 220,000 NCOs, 70% are public associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Entry</td>
<td>Certain persons, including foreign persons and stateless persons, may not become founders, members, or participants. Registration procedures are overly bureaucratic, with excessive documentation requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Activities</td>
<td>Supervisory power allowing for interference with internal affairs of public associations and NCOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Speech and/or Advocacy</td>
<td>Potential restrictions against NCO advocacy activity may arise through application of criminal or administrative penalties codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to International Contact</td>
<td>No legal barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Resources</td>
<td>Foreign or international organizations wishing to make tax-exempt grants to Russian citizens or NCOs must be on a list of organizations approved by the Russian Government; access to this list is severely limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Indicators

| Population | 140,041,247 (July 2009 est.) |
| Capital | Moscow |
| Type of Government | Federation |
| Life Expectancy at Birth | 66.03 years |
| Literacy Rate | 99.4% |
| Religious Groups | Russian Orthodox 15-20%, Muslim 10-15%, other Christian 2% (2006 est.) |
| note: estimates are of practicing worshipers; Russia has large populations of non-practicing believers and non-believers, a legacy of over seven decades of Soviet rule. |
| Ethnic Groups | Russian 79.8%, Tatar 3.8%, Ukrainian 2%, Bashkir 1.2%, Chuvash 1.1%, other or unspecified 12.1% (2002 census) |
| GDP per capita | $15,800 (2008 est.) |


### International Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking Body</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Ranking Scale (best – worst possible)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN Human Development Index</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1 – 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Rule of Law Index</td>
<td>16.7 (2007)</td>
<td>100 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank Voice &amp; Accountability Index</td>
<td>20.2 (2007)</td>
<td>100 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency International</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1 – 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom House: Freedom in the World</td>
<td>Status: Not Free</td>
<td>Free/Partly Free/Not Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Rights: 6</td>
<td>1 – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil Liberties: 5</td>
<td>1 – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy: Failed States Index</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>177 – 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Legal Snapshot**

### International and Regional Human Rights Agreements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key International Agreements</th>
<th>Ratification*</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)</td>
<td>No**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)</td>
<td>No**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regional Treaties**

| Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE | Yes | 1990 |

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

** Country is a signatory to the agreement, but has not formally ratified it

### Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of the Russian Federation (as amended December 30, 2008) includes the following relevant provisions:

- **Article 19**
  1. All people shall be equal before the law and courts.
  2. The State shall guarantee the equality of rights and freedoms of man and citizen, regardless of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, religion, convictions, membership of public associations, and also of other circumstances. All forms of limitations of human rights on social, racial, national, linguistic or religious grounds shall be banned.
  3. Men and women shall enjoy equal rights and freedoms and have equal possibilities to exercise them.

- **Article 28**: Everyone shall be guaranteed the freedom of conscience, the freedom of religion, including the right to profess individually or together with others any religion or to profess no religion at all, to freely choose, possess and disseminate religious and other views and act according to them.

- **Article 29**
  1. Everyone shall be guaranteed the freedom of ideas and speech.
  2. Propaganda or agitation instigating social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife shall not be allowed. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or linguistic supremacy shall be banned.
  3. No one may be forced to express his views and convictions or to reject them.
  4. Everyone shall have the right to freely look for, receive, transmit, produce and distribute information by any legal means. The list of data comprising state secrets shall be determined by a federal law.
  5. The freedom of mass communication shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be banned.

- **Article 30**
  1. Everyone shall have the right to association, including the right to create trade unions for the protection of his or her interests. The freedom of activity of public association shall be guaranteed.
  2. No one may be compelled to join any association and remain in it.

### National Laws and Regulations Affecting Sector

Relevant national-level laws and regulations affecting civil society include:

ICNL: NGO Law Monitor - Russia

- Special Part of the RF Tax Code regulating property tax of legal entities, effective since January 1, 2004.

Pending NGO Legislative / Regulatory Initiatives

Several legislative and regulatory initiatives are currently pending, including the following:

- Amendments to the tax code to provide tax incentives for socially oriented organizations and their supporters (pending in the Government);
- Amendments to laws relating to the status of volunteers, in relationship to the Sochi Olympic Games;
- Federal program on State Support of Socially Oriented Organizations;
- New reporting forms for NCOs, which substantially simplify the reporting requirements prepared by the Ministry of Justice, available at the MoJ's website; and
- Draft Law on Public Expertise, which may help provide more opportunities for NGO engagement in policy-making with the Government;
- In addition, the State Duma is considering a bill that would expand the Federal Security Services (FSB) powers to a level some are comparing to the censorship controls of its predecessor, the KGB. The bill is part of the government’s battle against “extremism,” which it claims has been a growing threat over recent years. In a justification for the bill, a note on the State Duma’s website states the “law is necessary due to a sharp rise in extremist activity. The note cites figures from the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor-General's Office claiming that extremist crimes rose by 30 percent from 2007 to 2008..” [1]

We are unaware of any other pending legislative/regulatory initiatives affecting NGOs. Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at infoicnl@icnl.org.

[1] See more at: http://www.rferl.org/content/New_Russian_Legislation_Would_Increase_FSBs_Authority/2025950.html

Legal Analysis

Organizational Forms

The Russian Federation (Russia) recognizes a large number of organizational forms of non-governmental, non-commercial organizations (NCOs), resulting in a complex and oftentimes contradictory regulatory framework. The Civil Code and the Federal Law on Non-commercial Organizations (NCO Law) establish the primary NCO legal framework and define a variety of NCO forms (approximately 27), including public organizations, foundations, institutions, non-profit partnerships, and autonomous non-governmental organizations. The primary requirements are that NCOs, whatever their type, do not have the generation of profit as their primary objective and do not distribute any such profit among their participants (Article 50(1), Civil Code). The Federal Law on Public Associations builds upon this framework and carves out a sub-category of NCOs called "public associations" which consist of public organizations, mass movements, public foundations, public institutions, and several other forms. Some 220,000 NCOs are registered in Russia; approximately 70% of them are public associations.

Public Benefit Status
NCOs may register as a charity pursuant to the Charities Law. Federal law, however, does not provide any benefits that are particular to registered charities. Although legislation at the regional and local levels offers tax benefits to charities, they do not necessarily require the organization to be registered as a charity at the federal level. Tax benefits under Russian law are primarily tied to the support or performance of particular activities specified in the Tax Code. Registration of an NCO as a charity pursuant to the Charities Law provides the organization with a particular status and subjects the organization to heightened scrutiny, but this status does not in itself provide any unique tax benefits.

Amendments enacted to the NCO Law in April 2010 introduced the status of “socially oriented” organizations. Under the new law, socially oriented organizations will be eligible for governmental support and preferential tax treatment. NGOs engaged in a broad range of activities, including traditional charitable work, the provision of free-of-charge legal aid and the protection of human rights, will be eligible for the new legal status, and in turn, for governmental support.

Barriers to Entry

Russian law defines certain restrictions regarding potential founders of NCOs. Regarding non-citizens, only those foreign nationals and stateless persons who are “legally domiciled in the Russian Federation” may be founders, members, or participants in public associations or NCOs. Certain persons may not become founders, members or participants, including:

- Foreign nationals or stateless persons whose stay is deemed “undesirable”;
- Persons appearing on a money laundering and anti-terrorist financing watch list maintained by the Russian government;
- Organizations that have been suspended under the Law Countering Extremist Activities;
- Persons found by court decision to show signs of participating in extremist activity; and
- Persons who are currently incarcerated as a result of conviction of a crime.

Public associations, such as public organizations and public foundations, by definition can be created only by natural persons. These organizations cannot be founded by legal persons, but other public organizations may join as members (Articles 18 and 19, Law on Public Associations). By comparison, legal persons, including commercial entities, may found all other forms of NCOs.

A non-commercial organization shall be subject to state registration in compliance with the NCO law and Federal Law No. 129-FZ of August 8, 2001 on the State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Businessmen (hereinafter referred to as the Federal Law on State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Businessmen). Public associations shall be subject to state registration in compliance with the Law on Public Associations and Federal Law on State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Businessmen. The registration process for all types of NGOs is overly bureaucratic, with a long list of documents required to be submitted to the authorized governmental body. The same is true for foreign NGOs seeking to establish a branch office.

Barriers to Operational Activity

Public associations, with the exception of specialized organizations such as trade unions and political associations, have virtually no restrictions on the activities they may pursue as their primary objectives (Article 5, Law on Public Associations), including mutual benefit activities (Article 6(1), NCO Law, and Article 8, Law on Public Associations).

All foundations are required to engage in public benefit activities (Article 118(1), Civil Code, Article 7(1), NCO Law, and Article 10, Law on Public Associations). The primary activities of institutions are broadly defined as any managerial, socio-cultural or other activities of a not-for-profit nature (Article 120, Civil Code, Article 9, NCO Law, and Article 11, Law on Public Associations). Charities are required to promote at least one of the enumerated charitable activities indicated in the law (Article 2, Charities Law).

Articles 29 and 38 of the Law on Public Associations impose burdensome reporting requirements on public associations (PAs), by requiring them to submit information about the funding and property they receive from foreign and international organizations and foreign persons to the registration authority. Article 32 of the Law on NCOs imposes reporting requirements for NCOs and requires NCOs to report on their use of funds and other assets received from both foreign and local sources. Repeated failure on the part of a PA or an NCO to provide the information required in a timely fashion is grounds for the registration authority to bring a claim in court requesting a ruling that the organization terminate its activities as a legal entity, which then leads to its exclusion from the Unified State Register of Legal Entities.

Articles 29 and 38 of the Law on Public Associations and Article 32 of the NCO Law authorize governmental registration authorities to engage in highly intrusive means of scrutiny of public associations and NCOs without appropriate procedural protections. The registration authority may use the following tools to interfere in the internal operations of a PA or NCO:

- The power to summon resolutions of the organization’s governing body. The registration authority has the ability to demand documents dealing with the details of an organization’s governance, including day-to-day policy decisions, supervision of the organization’s management, and oversight of its finances.
The power to send representatives to an organization’s events. The Law allows the government to send a representative to all of an organization's events, without restriction, including internal strategy sessions and grant selection meetings, for example.

The power to review the extent to which an organization’s activities comply with its statutory goals, including review of its expenditures and property management. The registration authority has authority to review the compliance of organizations with their goals – even though the registration authority itself lacks expertise needed to judge whether particular activities are designed to meet an organization’s goals.

Article 23 of the NCO Law also provides the registration authority with two additional intrusive supervisory powers over the branches, representative offices, and affiliates of foreign NGOs. The government can issue a written decision banning the implementation of any existing program of a branch office of a foreign NGO. The Law does not provide any guidance with respect to the grounds on which the government may make this decision, which appear to be entirely discretionary. Upon receipt of a decision, the office of the foreign NGO must terminate the activity, and if it fails to do so, it risks exclusion from the register and liquidation of the office. The Law also allows the registration authority to issue a written decision banning the transfer by an foreign NGO’s branch, representative office, or affiliate of funds or other resources to particular recipients for the purposes of protecting the basis of the Constitutional system, morality, health, rights and lawful interests of other persons, and with the aim of defending the country and the state security. The Law does provide foreign NGOs the right to appeal against actions taken against them by the government.

Barriers to Speech / Advocacy

Neither the Civil Code nor the NCO Law limits the ability of NCOs to engage in advocacy or political activities. All forms of public associations may participate in advocacy and lobbying activities. Under the law, NCOs generally may also engage in election campaigns for federal and local elections, subject to federal election laws (Article 27, Law on Public Associations).

A potential obstacle to advocacy activity springs from the general requirement that NGO activities must be in compliance with its by-laws (i.e., if government auditors discover that activities were not outlined in its by-laws, an NGO will be subject to penalties). In addition, there are a range of other regulatory acts (not specifically targeting NGOs), including criminal and administrative penalty codes, which can be applied against human rights and/or advocacy groups.

Charities are expressly prohibited from using their assets to support political parties, movements, and campaigns (Article 2(2), Charities Law). In addition, religious organizations, governmental and municipal institutions, international public associations, and international movements are prohibited from making donations to candidates (Article 58 (6), Federal Law No. 19-FZ "On RF President elections," January 10, 2003, and Article 66 (7), Federal Law No. 175-FZ "On RF State Duma deputies elections," July 20, 2002, as amended). However, these prohibitions do not appear to extend to involvement in lobbying or other politically-related activities.

Barriers to International Contact

There are no legal barriers to international communication and contact.

Barriers to Resources

Foreign Funding

The primary barrier against foreign funding relates to the giving of tax-exempt grants. Foreign or international organizations wishing to make tax-exempt grants to Russian citizens or NCOs must be on a list of organizations approved by the Russian Government. Such grants may be made only for purposes specified by Russian Tax Code: for the implementation of specific programs in the sphere of education, art, culture, health care (AIDS, drug addiction, children oncology, including oncohematology, children endocrinology, hepatitis, tuberculosis) environmental protection, protection of human and civil rights, social services of the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of citizens, as well as for holding specific scientific research.

In June of 2008, the Russian Government adopted Decree #485, regarding the Government's pre-approved list of foreign grantors (hereinafter referred to as the "List"). Decree #485 contained a reduced number of approved international organizations and made clear that as of January 1, 2009, only international organizations mentioned in the Decree could remain on the List. Grants from foreign organizations not included on the List are considered taxable income for Russian recipients, unless they otherwise qualify as donations under Russian law. (The current regulation is applicable only to grants; donations, including those from foreign organizations to non-commercial organizations are tax exempt.)

On March 24, 2009, Prime Minister Putin signed Decree #252, amending Decree #485. Decree #485 empowered the Ministry of Finance to make changes and additions to the List. Decree #252 instead authorizes interested ministries – and not solely the Ministry of Finance – to initiate changes and additions to the List.

In addition, NCOs must provide information regarding donations obtained from foreign organizations to the Ministry of Justice.
Domestic Funding

An NCO may engage in economic activities to the extent they advance the purposes for which the organization was created, but may not pursue the generation of profit as its primary purpose (Article 50(3), Civil Code, Articles 2 and 24(2), NCO Law, Article 37, Law on Public Associations, and Article 12, Charities Law). Profit from the economic activities of NCOs, including charities, is generally taxed in the same manner as for commercial organizations. Lower tax rates may be offered by regional or local authorities for qualifying NCOs. Registration as a charity does not affect or limit the right of an NCO to engage in economic activities (Article 12, Charities Law).

Reports

| UN Universal Periodic Review Reports | National Report  
Compilation of UN Information  
Corrigendum  
Summary of Stakeholders’ Information  
Questions submitted in advance  
Report of the Working Group  
Decision on the Outcome |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reports of UN Special Rapporteurs</td>
<td>No relevant reports available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USIG (United States International Grantmaking) Country Notes</td>
<td>Russian Federation Country Information current as of February 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| U.S. State Department               | Advancing Freedom and Democracy Report 2008: Russia  
2008 Human Rights Report: Russia |
| Failed States Index Reports        | Foreign Policy 2008 Failed States Index  
Fund for Peace Country Profile: Russia 2008 |
| IMF Country Reports                | Concluding Statement of 2009 Article IV Consultation Mission: Russian Federation |
| Asia Pacific Philanthropy Forum Reports | Not available                                                |
| NGO Regulation Network Reports     | Not available                                                  |
| CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) Country Reports | Civil Society Index - Country Report for Russia |
| International Center for Not-for-Profit Law Online Library | Russia |

News and Additional Resources

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

General News

Sochi 2014 Volunteer Practices Enshrined In Russian Law (July 2010)
Following the third and final reading, the Russian State Duma has adopted several amendments to the existing law directed at enhancing the efficiency of the preparations for the Sochi 2014 Winter Games. This change in legislation is a
key point in the Organizing Committee’s development of a thriving volunteer movement in Russia following Sochi 2014. A particular amendment was the formalizing of the ‘Games volunteer’ concept into law, which was originally initiated by the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee and allows them to regulate administrative questions related to the work of volunteers. (Read more)

EU urges Russia to protect human-rights workers in North Caucasus (July 2010)
The European Union on 15 July urged Russia to protect human-rights workers in the troubled North Caucasus region, a year after a leading activist was murdered. Investigators have not yet concluded the case, despite the fact that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev demanded quick results. The EU "strongly encourages the authorities of the Russian Federation to work towards putting an end to the climate of impunity and fear in the North Caucasus in general and Chechnya in particular, and hopes for swift results in the investigation into the death of Ms Estemirova,” member states said in a joint declaration. (Read more)
The full statement is available here.

Russia's Duma OKs more power for security service (July 2010)
Russia's lower house of parliament has approved a bill that would widen the powers of the Federal Security Service, the KGB's main successor agency. The bill would allow the agency to issue warnings to people suspected of preparing to commit crimes. Critics say this power could be used to intimidate government opponents and stifle protests. (Read more)

Can reset push Russia toward democracy? (July 2010)
When I asked the young human rights activist whether she perceived any substantive difference between Russia's genial president and its surly prime minister, there was an almost imperceptible sigh. (Read more)

Russia's Security Service Could Gain Powers Formerly Associated With Soviet KGB (June 2010)
Russia's parliament is considering a new law that would extend the powers of the country’s secret security agency, the FSB. If the bill is passed, it would restore practices once associated with the infamous KGB. Russia's security services have steadily regained power and influence under Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, himself a former KGB officer. Human rights advocates are concerned that the new measures could further curtail the rights of government critics and the independent media. (Read more)

EU chief raps Russia on human rights, media freedom (June 2010)
European Union President Herman Van Rompuy on Tuesday said Europe was seriously concerned about the difficulties faced by human rights activists and journalists in Russia. "The situation for human rights defenders and journalists in Russia is of grave concern to the European public at large," Van Rompuy said at a briefing following an EU-Russia summit in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. (Read more)

Sochi 2014 Proposed to Legalize Volunteers (April 2010)
The State Duma Committee on Youth Affairs held parliamentary hearings on "Legal aspects of development of the volunteer movement in Russia." The hearing was attended by deputies of the State Duma, the cities of Sochi and Kazan, as well as Sochi 2014 experts, who initiated amendments to the existing legislation. (Read more)

Russia dismisses U.S. human rights report (March 2010)
In a statement laced with sarcasm, the Foreign Ministry said the main purpose of what it called the U.S. State Department's annual "opus" on human rights worldwide was to "solve the internal political problems of the American establishment." The Russia section of the State Department report, released on Thursday, cited problems and abuses ranging from corruption and unfair elections to the killings of journalists who reported critically on the government. (Read more)

Russia Ends Opposition to Rights Court (January 2010)
The Russian parliament on Friday reversed its longstanding opposition to reforms in the European Court of Human Rights, as part of a new push to smooth over differences with the country’s European partners. Legislators in the lower house voted 392 to 56 to ratify the reforms, news agencies reported. (Read more)

Chechenya president sues human rights activist over murder claim (September 2009)
The reputation of Chechnya's Kremlin-appointed leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, was under question in a Moscow court today, as he launched a defamation suit against the leader of Russia's leading human rights group, Memorial. Kadyrov is seeking 10m roubles (£207,800) in damages from Oleg Orlov, the chairman of Memorial, in the wake of the row over the kidnapping and murder of a human rights activist, Natalia Estemirova, in Grozny in July. Orlov had accused Kadyrov of being guilty of the murder, explaining in his defence today that he meant "political guilt". (Read more)

Russia loosens clasp on NGOs ahead of Obama visit (July 2009)
The Kremlin eased some restrictions on Russian NGOs on Friday ahead of a visit by U.S. President Barack Obama, in the first major move to strengthen civil society since President Dmitry Medvedev took office. The move was applauded by human rights activists, who said that the reforms cover only a third of NGOs and a lot more remains to be done to improve Russia's human rights record. (Read more)

Kremlin Takes Small Step to Ease NGO Law (May 2009)
Russia's stifling NGO law has been labeled a hallmark of former President Vladimir Putin's heavy-handed approach to civil liberties. Likewise, President Dmitry Medvedev's recent promise to review the law has been praised as a sign of his liberalism. But when the first details of that reform emerged this week, nongovernmental organizations said Medvedev's...
liberalization turned out to be top-down, leaving them with little extra room to maneuver. (read more)

International Commission of Jurists

Personal Statement by Mary Robinson, President of the ICJ, on the killing of Natalya Estemirova (July 2009)
I was deeply saddened and appalled to learn of the cruel abduction and murder of Natalya Estemirova. She was one of the most courageous and inspiring human rights defenders I have met. (read more)

National Endowment for Democracy: Democracy Digest

Russia court verdict against NED grante (October 2009)
Further to this item, a Moscow court has ordered Oleg Orlov, chair of the Memorial human rights NGO to retract his statement that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov was personally culpable in the murder of Natalya Estemirova, the Memorial activist kidnapped and murdered on July 15. (read more)

Engaging Russia - with no Illusions (September 2009)
The Obama administration is pursuing a dual track approach to dealing with Russia – engaging both government and civil society, a democracy forum heard this week. On his recent trip, President Barack Obama had spent considerable time meeting civil society and opposition groups, the National Security Council’s Michael McFaul said. (read more)

Estemirova murder: an act of “true political terror” – and urgent moral imperative (July 2009)
More than 100 international figures are demanding that the Russian authorities find the killers of human rights activist Natalya Estemirova and “end the killings of journalists and human rights defenders in the Russian Federation.” Estemirova was abducted in Grozny on July 15 and found dead in neighboring Ingushetia the same day. (read more)

World Movement for Democracy: Democracy Alerts

Russian Human Rights Defender and Independent Journalist Murdered (January 2009)
On January 19, human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and reporter Anastasia Baburova were gunned down in the middle of the afternoon in downtown Moscow. Markelov was a well-known and respected figure in Russia's human rights community. He was the president and founder of the Rule of Law Institute, an organization formed to protect human rights and the rule of law. Baburova was working for NOVAYA GAZETA, formerly headed by murdered journalist Anna Politkovskaya. She had written a number of reports on Russia's growing problem of racism and neo-Nazi violence. (read more)

Inter Press Service News Agency

RUSSIA: Chechen Civilians Face Collective Punishment (July 2009)
Russian federal and Chechen authorities should immediately put a stop to home burnings and other collective punishment practices against families of alleged insurgents in Chechnya, said a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) released Thursday. The report, "'What Your Children Do Will Touch Upon You': Punitive House-Burning in Chechnya," documents a distinct pattern of house burnings by security forces to punish families for the alleged actions of their relatives. (read more)

The foregoing information was collected by the ICNL NGO Law Monitor partner organization in Russia.