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Commissioner Hammarberg deplores murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya

Strasbourg, 07.10.2006 - The Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, is deeply shocked by the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, an award-winning Russian journalist whose work on human rights issues has been internationally acclaimed. She was shot at the entrance of her Moscow home today by unknown assailants.

"Anna Politkovskaya was one of the most important human rights defenders in Russia today," Mr Hammarberg said. "Her dedicated work exposed grave human rights violations in the North Caucasus region, thereby allowing the world to understand that hidden corner of the world. Having known her well and respected her enormously, the news of her death has made me very sad and angry. She is a great loss for Russia, and a great loss for the cause of human rights."

Ms. Politkovskaya was a special correspondent for the Moscow-based newspaper Novaya Gazeta, and was one of the leading voices reporting on the atrocities committed in Chechnya.

"While not everyone agreed with her views, no-one questioned her professionalism, courage and personal dedication to revealing the truth about controversial political issues," Mr Hammarberg stated. "Ms. Politkovskaya's murder signals a major crisis of free expression and journalistic safety in Russia. The Russian authorities already failed at investigating previous murder attempts and death threats on her life. They now have no excuse to not thoroughly investigate the circumstances of her death, and punish those who committed this deplorable crime."

Ms. Politkovskaya acted as a mediator in the Nord-Ost theatre siege in Moscow in 2002, and has been the recipient of numerous international honours, including the Olof Palme Prize for outstanding achievement (2005), the First Prize of the Lettre Ulysses Award (2003), the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation (2002), the Most Courageous Defence of Free Expression from Index on Censorship (2002) as well as a Special Award of Amnesty International (2001)

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