

Press Release

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Killing of Natalia Estemirova

Statement by Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg

Strasbourg, 15.07.2009 - The brutal assassination of Natalia Estemirova was a horrible and cowardly crime and an attack against fundamental human rights principles. A determined and effective response is now required.

Mrs Estemirova was abducted Wednesday morning in Grozny, Chechnya. She was pushed into a car by several assailants as she left her apartment at around 08.30 AM.

Some hours later her dead body was found in Ingushetia, in a forest near Nazran. According to the information received, she was killed by a headshot.

Natalia Estemirova was one of the leading members of the Memorial HRC in the North Caucasus and had received several international awards for human rights protection in Chechen Republic. In particular, she was the first winner of the Anna Politkovskaya Award in 2007.

I express my deep condolences to the family and colleagues of Mrs Estemirova and urge the Russian authorities to carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation with a view to ensuring the criminal accountability and punishment of the perpetrators, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and with the Committee of Ministers Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

The killing of Mrs Estemirova is a reminder that much stronger actions are needed to protect activist members of human rights organisations.