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**THE OBSERVATORY - PRESS RELEASE**

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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION: Ongoing criminal proceedings against Mr. Oleg Orlov**

***Paris-Geneva, November 26, 2010. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), sent an observer to the hearing held on November 25, 2010 in the criminal case lodged by Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov against Mr. Oleg Orlov, Chairman of the board of the Human Rights Centre (HRC) "Memorial". This follows a statement in which Mr. Orlov indicated he believed the Chechen President was responsible for the murder on July 15, 2009 of Ms. Natalia Estemirova, Head of Memorial office in Grozny.***

The hearing of November 25, 2010<sup>1</sup> took place before the District Court No. 363 of Khamovniki district in Moscow, and was dedicated to the examination of the first defence witnesses. They reported in particular on the general climate of fear and impunity prevailing in Chechnya, and on the difficult context in which members of the HRC "Memorial" office in Grozny were operating.

Witnesses also reported that at the occasion of meetings held between Mr. Kadyrov and Ms. Estemirova – especially in March 2004 and February 2008, Mr. Kadyrov had been threatening and insulting towards Ms. Estemirova.

The Observatory recalls that Miklos Haraszti, OSCE High Representative on Freedom of the Media, pointed out that "*statements like Orlov's are perfectly legitimate in a democracy and should be subject neither to civil-law nor to criminal-law sanctioning*".

The Observatory is therefore concerned by the ongoing judicial harassment against Mr. Oleg Orlov, which seem to merely aim at obstructing his human rights activities.

The trial is expected to resume on December 16, 2010. The Observatory will continue to follow the proceedings, and calls upon the relevant Russian authorities to conform with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international and regional human rights instruments ratified by the Russian Federation.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Observatory Judicial Observation Mission Report on the trial against the Human Rights Centre "Memorial" and Mr. Orlov, available at the following links:  
<http://www.fidh.org/Publication-of-a-judicial-observation-report-on> and  
[http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2009/Russia\\_Judicial\\_observation\\_mission\\_dec09\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.omct.org/pdf/Observatory/2009/Russia_Judicial_observation_mission_dec09_ENG.pdf).