

November 23, 2005

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar  
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6225

Dear Senator Lugar:

As representatives of nongovernmental organizations in the United States that are working to promote democracy and human rights in Russia as well as the economic and societal welfare of its people, we write to express our profound concern regarding the proposed Russian law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation." We urge you to write immediately to the Russian State Duma and President Putin as well as to the leaders of the G-7 to express your concern. The draft law passed its first reading in the State Duma today and could take effect after its second reading scheduled for December 9, 2005.

If the law is enacted, it will cast doubt on Russia's suitability to lead the G-8 and the Council of Europe next year because the law is a fundamental break from the commitments Russia made to democratic progress when it joined these bodies.

The draft law will not satisfy its stated aim of stabilizing civil society. On the contrary, the law would give the Russian government such tight control over public associations that it would likely paralyze civil society. This law covers human rights, educational, and cultural organizations as well as those providing critical humanitarian and health services to the Russian Federation.

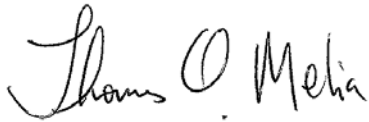
The proposed amendments violate numerous provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as international obligations. We want to draw your attention to the fact that the draft law differs significantly from the legislation of G-7 countries and international standards.

We are particularly concerned that it will:

- \* Violate the fundamental, universal rights of freedom of expression and association;
- \* Establish excessive and intrusive regulations leading to unified, state control over public organizations;
- \* Create an overly complicated registration procedure for NGOs and permit government officials to deny registration to NGOs arbitrarily;
- \* Discriminate against foreign NGOs and citizens and outlaw representative branches of NGOs that provide valuable assistance to Russians;
- \* Subject NGOs to inspections and audits at any time and without limitation;
- \* Liquidate NGOs that are unable to obtain registration and destroy thousands of jobs, dealing a heavy blow to the economy as well as to civil society in Russia;
- \* Isolate Russia from the international community.

We hope that you and your colleagues in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will do everything in your power to reach out to the Russian government, to President Bush and to his counterparts in the G-7 to raise concern about the implications of the proposed legislation for civil society in Russia and for Russia's standing in the eyes of the international community.

Signed:



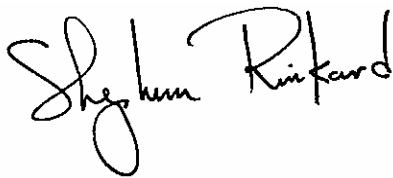
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Thomas O. Melia, Acting Executive Director  
Freedom House



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Charles William Maynes, President  
The Eurasia Foundation



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Stephen Rickard, Director  
Open Society Institute-Washington, DC



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Douglas Rutzen, President  
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law



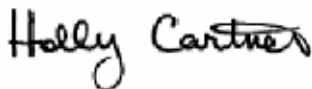
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William F. Schulz, Executive Director  
Amnesty International USA



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Kenneth Wollack, President  
National Democratic Institute



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Executive Director  
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Human Rights Watch



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Lorne Craner, President  
International Republican Institute



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Eric R. Biel  
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Mark Pomar, President  
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