

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

President Vladimir Putin  
c/o H.E. Ambassador Yuri V. Ushakov  
Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United States  
2650 Wisconsin Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20007

By Fax: 202-298-5735

Dear Mr. President,

As Members of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus (CHRC), a bi-partisan and bi-cameral working group on human rights in the United States Congress, we write to express our concern about your government's efforts to shut down a non-governmental human rights organization, the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society. The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society is an internationally respected organization and is one of the few remaining independent groups providing vital reporting on the human rights situation in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. As documented by numerous international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Human Rights First, the organization has suffered a long history of threats, harassment and attacks.

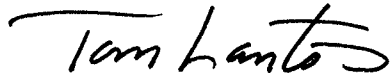
In addition, managing director of the Society, Stanislav Dmitrievsky, was convicted on February 3, 2006 of "inciting ethnic hatred" for having published articles calling for peace in Chechnya in a newsletter. Under the NGO law adopted in January 2006, once convicted, Dmitrievsky was obliged to step down from his leadership position with the organization. Moreover, the organization should have publicly condemned its director within five days of the court ruling. But the Society continued to operate. On October 13, 2006 a court in Nizhny Novgorod ordered the closure of the organization under the NGO law.

Closing a human rights organization for publishing non-violent commentary on a pressing national human rights issue would set a terrible precedent. We fear that closing the RCFS will be a further escalation in a growing wave of repression that threatens all independent human rights activists in Russia. Functioning, independent, nongovernmental human rights organizations are essential to the development and success of free societies and they play a vital role in ensuring an accountable, democratic government in Russia. The closure order against the RCFS has already sent a chilling message to civil society in Russia, particularly in the aftermath of the unsolved killing of the eminent journalist and activist Anna Politkovskaya. Threats, intimidation, and acts of violence against human rights defenders have the effect of deterring the public from exercising its fundamental rights of expression and association.

On January 23, 2007, the Supreme Court of Russia will consider the appeal of a decision to close down a prominent Russian human rights organization pursuant to the widely

criticized NGO law. Mr. President, we believe that you should play a positive and constructive role in ensuring that Russia uphold basic freedoms of expression and association. We hope that your government will withdraw its opposition to the organization's appeal, and that the closure order against the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society is lifted.

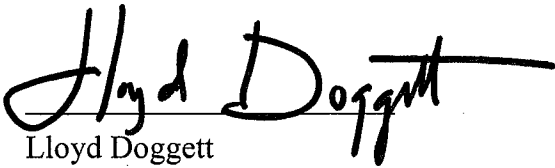
Sincerely,



Tom Lantos, M.C.  
Co-Chair, CHRC



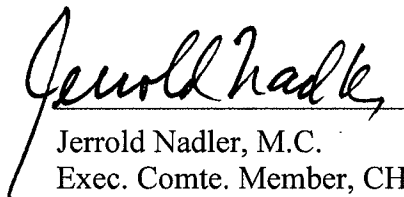
Frank R. Wolf  
Co-Chair, CHRC



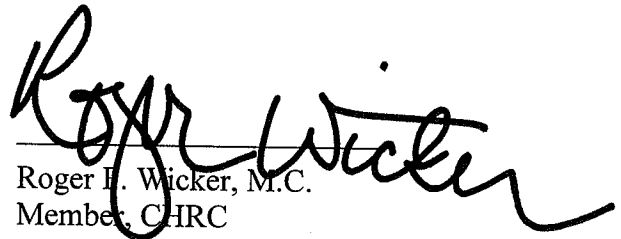
Lloyd Doggett  
Co-Chair, CHRC Working Group on Russia



Thomas H. Allen, M.C.  
Exec. Comte. Member, CHRC



Jerrold Nadler, M.C.  
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Roger Wicker, M.C.  
Member, CHRC