

Finns Call on Medvedev to End Violations of Rights and Freedoms in Russia

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Window on Eurasia covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author **Paul Goble** is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

Four leading Finnish non-governmental organizations have called on visiting President Dmitry Medvedev to live up to his promises to protect human rights and civic freedoms and to end the violence against journalists and ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation that are creating a gulf between Moscow and Europe.

[The appeal](#), signed by the leaders of the Kiila Social Union, the Finno-Russian Civic Forum, the Finnish Section of Amnesty International, and the Finnish PEN Center, says that its members "had hoped for the development in Russia of a society which shares European values like human rights and civic freedoms."

But given recent developments in various sectors of Russian life, it continues, the signatories "are deeply concerned by the state of the observation of human rights in Russia," all the more so because Medvedev, as in [his interview with Novaya Gazeta](#), offered himself as a defender of these rights.

"Are you seriously prepared for a change in the law on non-governmental organizations," the appeal's authors ask. "Are you genuinely attached to the rule of law and the defense of human rights?" And with regard to these questions, the Finnish NGOs challenge the Russian president: "Will we see actions and not just words?"

"Over the past 15 years," the appeal notes, "more than 150 journalists have been killed." Attacks against them and other supporters of civil society "must be stopped, and the guilty brought to justice," regardless of whether the victims have attracted the attention of the international community or involve less well-known people.

The appeal also expresses the concerns of these groups about the status of national minorities in the Russian Federation. "The multi-cultural tradition is the wealth of Russia," it says, adding that "we hope for the decisive interference of the government leadership of Russia in the area of racist crimes."

It continues with an expression of concern about the status of Finno-Ugric peoples in particular, noting that "the open oppression" of one of these groups "has been continuing in the Mari El Republic since 2001," when then-president Vladimir Putin installed his own man and called for the imposition of a power vertical there.

The appeal also calls for a full investigation of "the military crimes and violation of human rights which took place during the Chechen wars," for the support of the Chechen people in reestablishing not only the economy of their republic but also democracy and human rights." Justice requires, it says, "the scrupulous identification of those who violated" these rights.

But perhaps the most provocative part of the appeal is the following. "We are concerned," the Finnish NGOs say, "that among the deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation are people who have been charged with murder and are wanted on international warrants" but against whom Moscow has failed to take action.

The Finnish appeal calls on Moscow to obey the decisions of the European Human Rights Court, to ratify the protocol on that court, and to help build "effective horizontal cooperation" — not just government-to-government but people-to-people — as part of the European Union's action plan for Russia.

So far during his two-day visit to Helsinki, Medvedev has not commented on this declaration, and most Moscow media have ignored it. But at least two Russian websites have posted it (gazeta.ru and kasparov.ru), allowing Russians some access to this Finnish expression of concern about their problems.

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