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PRESS RELEASE

Human Rights Committee: ARTICLE 19 Urges the Human Rights Committee to Hold Russia Accountable

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Human Rights Committee (“the Committee”) to hold the Russian Federation accountable for ongoing and systematic abuses and violations of the right to freedom of expression.

Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“the Covenant”), States must submit to a periodic review of their implementation of the Covenant’s provisions. Russia’s sixth periodic report comes under scrutiny today by the HRC at its 97th session in Geneva. In a shadow report submitted to the Committee, ARTICLE 19 provides detailed evidence of a range of abuses of the right to freedom of expression in Russia.

During the period under review, ARTICLE 19 finds that freedom of expression has steadily deteriorated in the Russian Federation. Journalists and media workers remain under constant threat of attack and there is an absence of thorough and impartial investigations into killings and assaults against journalists. Instead, a climate of impunity for crimes against journalists prevails.

Public officials, including those at the highest level of the Government, refuse to view the media as an independent critic and often regard it as a subordinate body aimed at furthering political goals. Defamation laws are regularly employed to stifle journalists and media outlets.

Opposition groups are suppressed and prevented from engaging in peaceful protest, and there are increasing incidents of attacks against minorities, including religious, sexual and ethnic groups. Legislation governing extremism and religious hatred is being used to suppress criticism of the Russian authorities, as well as artistic free expression.

“ARTICLE 19 calls on the Human Rights Committee to carefully examine and expose the deplorable human rights record of the Russian Federation, and to hold this Government accountable to its human rights obligations under the Covenant,” says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

ARTICLE 19 has been working in the Russian Federation for the last decade, in close co-operation with local partners, on projects relating to freedom of expression, freedom of information and defamation. Given the severity of the violations outlined in the report, ARTICLE 19 urges the Human Rights Committee to exert pressure over

the Russian Government to ensure that everyone in the Russian Federation is able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression without intimidation, violence or harassment.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- The full version of the Written Comments of ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression Concerning the Review of the Sixth Periodic Report of the Russian Federation for Consideration by the United Nations Human Rights Committee at its 97th Session, 12-30 October 2009 is available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/submissions/russia-written-comments-of-article-19-global-campaign-for-free-expression-co.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works globally to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech. For more information on ARTICLE 19 please visit www.article19.org.