

## **Freedom of expression in Russia**

*[UNIC Moscow's submission to the review of Russia under the UPR mechanism]*

Freedom of expression is widely believed in the human rights community to be on the decline in Russia. According to HR activists, selective use of bureaucratic regulations, passage of vague laws and, in some instances, politically motivated criminal investigations against critics are characteristic of this trend.

Fair-minded analysts conclude, however, that freedom of speech, if imperfect, does exist in Russia. A number of major media outlets maintain their editorial independence and express opposition views. The dynamic growth in printed, electronic and Internet-based publications is a fact of life. Self-reliant regional newspapers display remarkable integrity and resilience. The Russian Internet offers its own take on events as an alternative to the official line.

That said, pressure on Russian independent media outlets was considerable in 2007-2008. The government tightened its control in the run-up to the State Duma and Presidential elections, concentrating particularly on the national TV channels seen as a political resource. Also, the State Duma took several steps, criticized by civil society members, including adoption of the legislation reclassifying the libel of public officials as extremism. As a result, several outlets have softened their reporting of the authorities.

The insecurity of journalists has remained a real danger to press freedom in Russia. The failure to punish those responsible for killing journalists, including investigative reporter Anna Politkovskaya, is believed to force many to practice self-sensorship.

However, some recent developments suggest brighter prospects. In May 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of media activist Manana Aslamaziyan, agreeing that a law under which she had been charged was so vaguely worded as to be unconstitutional.

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