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PRESS RELEASE

## North Caucasus: Fire Destroys Offices of Human Rights Organisation

**ARTICLE 19 calls on the Governments of Russian and the Republican Government of Dagestan to ensure the safety of all human rights defenders, journalists and activists working in Dagestan, after a fire this morning destroyed the offices of the largest human rights organisation in Russia's troubled North Caucasian republic.**

No-one was hurt in the fire at the premises of the “Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights”, but the organisation’s head, Svetlana Isayeva, believes it was an arson attack. According to Isayeva, the staff had been working from home for two weeks and all equipment was switched off because there was no electricity – this seems to suggest that there was no electrical fault that could have caused the fire.

The Mothers of Dagestan is due to launch a new US-funded project on legal defence and the monitoring of human right abuses in Dagestan later this month.

This attack is just the latest in a series of violent events recently that seem to confirm an escalating level of intimidation against human rights defenders in the North Caucasus.

Abdulmalik Ahmedilov, editor-in-chief of the *Sogratl* newspaper in Dagestan was found dead in his car last week, the fourth killing of a journalist in Dagestan this year.

In neighbouring Chechnya, Zarema Sadulayeva, the head of the Chechen youth organisation “Save the Generation” and her husband, who also worked for the organisation, were abducted in Grozny on 10 August. Their bodies were found the next day in their car.

These killings came less than a month after the murder of Natalia Estemirova, a well-respected human rights activist and representative of Memorial in Chechnya. Estemirova had been investigating disappearances and extra-judicial killings in Chechnya.

ARTICLE 19 urges the Russian authorities to immediately undertake all necessary actions to provide security and protection for journalists and human rights defenders in the North Caucasus and to guarantee fair and transparent investigation into all those cases.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information, please contact Anoush Begoyan, Programme Officer, Europe, [anoushb@article19.org](mailto:anoushb@article19.org) tel +44 20 7324 2506
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world 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.