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Russian Federation: ICJ calls for investigation and accountability following murder of Stanislav Markelov

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today expressed its grave concern at the murder in Moscow yesterday of prominent human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and called for a thorough, prompt and independent criminal investigation to hold to account those responsible.

Mr Markelov was shot dead by an unknown gunman after leaving a press conference on a case in which he represented the family of a murdered Chechen woman. A journalist with the Novaya Gazeta newspaper, Anastasia Baburova was also fatally wounded in the attack.

"Lawyers such as Stanislav Markelov perform a vital role in maintaining a legal system that is effective in protecting human rights. Yet increasingly, in Russia, lawyers who represent victims of human rights violations, in common with other human rights defenders, face attack and intimidation. If the rule of law is to be preserved, it is essential that lawyers be able to conduct their work without fear for their safety." said the ICJ.

Mr Markelov was a prominent litigator on human rights issues in Russia, in particular in relation to the North Caucasus, before both the Russian courts and the European Court of Human Rights. He had represented the families of victims of violence in a number of sensitive and high-profile cases, including the case of Anna Politkovskaya, the murdered Russian journalist, and that of Kheda Kunsaeva, a young woman murdered by a Russian colonel in Chechnya in 2000. He had previously been attacked and threatened on a number of occasions, in incidents apparently related to his work as a lawyer. The ICJ expressed its concern that, despite this, the authorities had not taken steps to protect him.

"The Russian Government must strongly condemn these murders and take steps to protect lawyers and others human rights defenders under threat. Russia's international human rights law obligations, including under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, require that there should now be a thorough, prompt and independent criminal investigation. Only such an investigation, leading to the prosecution of the instigators as well as the perpetrators of these murders, can restore confidence in the rule of law in Russia." the ICJ said.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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