



# INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

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17 July 2009

## **Personal Statement by Mary Robinson, President of the ICJ, on the killing of Natalya Estemirova**

I was deeply saddened and appalled to learn of the cruel abduction and murder of Natalya Estemirova. She was one of the most courageous and inspiring human rights defenders I have met.

When I traveled to Chechnya as UN High Commissioner in spring 2000 to assess the human rights situation from the conflict there, Natalya and her colleagues in the NGO Memorial were central to the mission. She briefed me at length on the human rights situation, including abuses by both Russian military and security personnel, and violations of international humanitarian law by Chechen fighters on the civilian population. Natalya arranged for me to meet privately with a number of civilian witnesses of violations by Russian forces, and interpreted for them in a gentle and supportive way that enabled them to give their terrible personal accounts.

Later, when I reported to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva I drew heavily on this material. From time to time I continued to hear of Natalya's courageous work, and I know her Memorial and wider human rights friends were increasingly concerned for her safety and alarmed by the growing hostility towards her of the Chechen President Ramzan A. Kadyrov and his administration.

This is yet another tragic example of cold blooded murder of a brave human rights defender. As President of the ICJ I strongly endorse the call the ICJ has made in its press release of 17 July for greater protection for her colleagues and associates, and for missions by relevant UN mandate holders to be facilitated to investigate fully her death and other human rights violations.