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For immediate release

P R E S S E R E L E A S E Russian Federation: ICJ urges the Russian Authorities to Investigate an Attack against Lawyer

The ICJ today expressed its concern at the recent attack on a lawyer involved in a high profile case in Moscow. On 13 May, Elena Levina, a Russian lawyer representing Mikhail Khodorkovsky in the appeal of his conviction on charges of theft of almost 350 million tons of oil and money laundering, was attacked as she was returning home late at night. Her bag, containing documents on the case of Mr Khodorkovsky, was taken from her. Most of Ms Levina's belongings were later found and returned to her. However, the documents on the case, including a draft of the defendant's appeal speech, are still missing.

The ICJ is concerned that the attack may be related to the lawyer's professional activity and her work on this highly sensitive case. "It is now vital that the attack be promptly and thoroughly investigated by the appropriate authorities and that all measures necessary for the protection of Ms Levina as well as other lawyers in the case should be taken", Róisín Pillay, ICJ Senior Legal Advisor for the Europe Programme, said today. "The authorities should send a clear signal that there will be no tolerance of intimidation or harassment of lawyers, or of violent attempts to secure confidential legal documents from the defence", she added.

The ICJ recalls that international human rights law, as well as the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, require that lawyers should be able to effectively represent their clients without undue interference from either public or private parties. This requires that states take active measures to protect against and investigate attacks on lawyers. The Basic Principles stipulate that states shall "ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference" and that when security of lawyers is under threat as a result of discharging their professional functions "they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities".

The ICJ urges the Russian authorities to undertake a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances and facts of the attack against Ms. Levina, identify the perpetrators and bring those responsible to account.

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