



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

6 March 2012

**STATEMENT BY
THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM
ON CAMPAIGN HARASSMENT OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS IN
NIZHNY NOVGOROD**

The Steering Committee of EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its strong concern about rapid aggravation of the situation in Nizhny Novgorod and the region with regard to the level of harassment of activists involved into legitimate and peaceful protests.

Despite relative tolerance of large public protests in the few recent weeks before the presidential elections of March 4th, Russian authorities are cracking down on individual government critics in different regions of the country. We are particularly concerned about the situation in Nizhny Novgorod where an intimidation campaign waged by Nizhny Novgorod Extremism Prevention Center against civic and opposition activists has been developing for months and has now reached a critical level.

Since early December 2011 around 60 incidents of harassment, intimidation and other actions of pressure against civic and political activists have been documented by local human rights organizations and journalists. Methods applied against activists in Nizhny Novgorod appear to be aimed at reprisals for their legitimate expression of protest and vary from "preventive" talks with activists and their relatives to direct assaults of people beaten up in streets, administrative custody on trumped-up grounds, and even fabricating criminal cases. These developments have no other purpose than to intimidate civic activists and Russian citizens concerned about political reality.

According to credible information provided by local human rights activists and journalists, there are strong indications of direct involvement of Extremism Prevention Center into organizing of these actions and even provocations against activists. There are facts proving that the "methodological" assistance to the anti-Extremism Center is provided by the Nizhny Novgorod Department of the FSB.

We condemn such illegal practices and demand that criminal investigations be opened into numerous facts of attacks against activists in Nizhny Novgorod and that their physical integrity be guaranteed.