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Amnesty International

# MONTHLY ACTION

ACTIVISM TEAM, Amnesty International UK  
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DECEMBER 2013

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## PUTIN: STOP THE CRACKDOWN

In January a group of people gathered in St Petersburg to have a snowball fight. The police responded by banning it and dispersing the crowd – calling it an ‘unauthorised gathering’. This may seem a ridiculous one off event but it isn’t.

Over the last two years Russian authorities have passed a series of laws that restrict the basic rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. From excessive fines for “unauthorised” public gatherings to the law further stigmatising the LGBTI community, from the smear campaign against NGO’s – “foreign agents” – to broadened, vague definitions of treason and espionage, from re-criminalising libel, to criminal prosecution for “offending the feelings of believers”, these laws have a chilling effect on civil society and undermine the legitimate role of NGO’s in Russia.

On 7 February 2014, the Winter Olympics will begin in the Russian city of Sochi. In the lead up to the games, Amnesty International will be putting these human rights violations under the spotlight.

### What you need to do

#### 1. Get as many people as possible to sign the petition enclosed.

On 3 February, Amnesty International will be sending an international delegation to Moscow to deliver these in person, so please make sure you send the sheets back to us by **20 January**.

**Send them to:** The Activism Team, Amnesty International UK, 17 – 25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA

#### 2. Take action for the Bolotnaya Three

The case of the Bolotnaya Three features in this years Write for Rights campaign. We are asking you to send a solidarity card to the three men directly, and an appeal letter to the Prosecutor General in Moscow – see attached case sheet for details.

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### GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

If you have any queries about this action please contact [activism@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:activism@amnesty.org.uk) or call us on 020 7033 1675  
[www.amnesty.org.uk/russia](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/russia)

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### Background information

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Since Vladimir Putin returned to office as Russia's President he has introduced laws that:

- **Severely limit freedom of assembly**  
Organisers of peaceful protests face significantly increased regulations and heavy fines if any of the restrictive rules and regulations are broken. In 2013 more than 600 people were detained in the course of 81 events in and around Moscow alone.
- **Restrict freedom of association**  
The 2012 "foreign agents" legislation unleashed a clampdown on NGO's across the country. NGO's who engage in "political activity" and receive foreign funding must register as "foreign agents" – this has contributed to a smear campaign against NGOs and human rights activists. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have had their Moscow offices raided. Several NGO's have been given heavy fines.
- **Stigmatise the LGBTI community**  
Homophobic legislation was introduced in 2013 to restrict the rights of freedom of expression and assembly of LGBTI people, and has encouraged homophobic violence across Russia. LGBTI events have been disrupted by counter-protestors and banned by the authorities, with participants detained for promoting "propaganda of non-traditional relations among minors". Anyone breaching the law, including foreigners, faces fines of up to US\$3,000.
- **Criminalise insulting the feelings of believers**  
The 'blasphemy' law was introduced after the 'Pussy Riot' punk group staged a brief and peaceful, albeit provocative political performance in the main Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow in 2011. Two of them are currently serving a two-year prison sentence after a politically motivated trial.

As a result of this new legislation, prominent government critics, opposition voices, watchdogs, ordinary individual protestors (on a wide range of issues) have all seen their rights restricted – especially this year.

### The Bolotnaya Three

Last year, Vladimir Georgievich Akimenkov, Artiom Victorovich Saviolov and Mikhail Aleksanderovich Kosenko joined thousands of Russians protesting against Vladimir Putin's rule in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square. The three men were arrested on dubious charges of assault and rioting. Since then the men have been held in custody, which is taking a toll on their health.

All three men firmly deny the charges and video footage supports their claims.

### The Olympics in Sochi

The campaign aims to use the Winter Olympics Games as an opportunity to put these human rights violations under the spotlight, rather than focusing on human rights violations resulting directly from the organisation of the games.

Shortly after the London 2012 Games, Russia issued a joint communiqué with the United Kingdom, Brazil and South Korea confirming their commitment to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games:

- To promote awareness, understanding and the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights among those watching and participating;
- As an opportunity to educate people on the values of respect, diversity, tolerance and fairness and as a means to combat all forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, and promote an inclusive society. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/human-rights-and-the-olympic-and-paralympic-games>

Now is the chance for Russia to deliver on that promise.

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