

Human Rights Court to review verdicts on Khodorkovsky and Lebedev



International Society for Human Rights: Judiciary and media in Russia follow line of the Kremlin

Frankfurt (14 November 2005) – Before the end of 2005, the lawyers of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former head of Russian oil company Yukos, and his partner Platon Lebedev are going to file a complaint at the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg. Khodorkovsky and Lebedev have been sentenced to eight years imprisonment for alleged fraud and tax evasion. The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) thinks the court proceedings were characterised by a considerable lack of rule of law and looked more like a show trial than a proper trial. The independence of the Russian judiciary is called into question by the unacceptable cooperation of the prosecution and the court. As the main media in Russia are controlled by the Kremlin, there is at the same time no critical coverage of the political cronyism of judges and prosecutors, the ISHR said.

In a discussion with board members of the ISHR in Frankfurt today, Platon Lebedev's lawyer Jevgeni Baru explained that judiciary and prosecution in Russia had cooperated by order of the Kremlin. All legal norms imaginable had been ignored. Baru said: "In Russia, there can be no positive decision on the case Khodorkovsky/Lebedev – because media coverage especially on public TV follows the general line set by the state. Long before the end of the trial, Khodorkovsky and Lebedev had been pre-convicted and labelled as public enemies." As the ISHR reports, Russian human rights organisations which get involved in favour of Khodorkovsky and Lebedev have experienced permanent pressure. The lawyers of Khodorkovsky and Lebedev believe that their clients' only chance is the support of the western public.

Irrespective of the question whether and in what way the two prisoners may be guilty of the offences they are accused of, the degree of penalty is entirely unjustifiable for an economic crime. The fact that the two prisoners – in conflict with the penal system – cannot serve their sentence in Moscow where they had their permanent residence but were brought to remote regions in Russia, proves that the enforcement of the sentence also follows political requirements, comments ISHR. The journey from Moscow to where Khodorkovsky is held takes six hours by plane.

The intention is to isolate the prisoners from their families, their lawyers and from society, because government is still afraid of Khodorkovsky's potential political influence even after the end of the trial. This is a further sign that the prosecution of the two men is politically motivated. The question whether Mikhail Khodorkovsky was arrested for his political convictions is no longer relevant, say the ISHR, which is also present in Russia. In jail, he has become a political prisoner.