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Russia

Stop the wave of repression against the opposition

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The demonstration which took place in Moscow on May 6, 2012 was one of the most massive and combative that has been seen since the beginning of this period of contestation. Tens of thousands of people invaded the capital, despite the pressure exerted by the authorities and the drop in morale that followed the "victory" of Vladimir Putin in the presidential elections in March. The action on May 6 showed that the wave of protest that began in December is not weakening. It is even experiencing a new beginning and taking a more radical and determined line.

On the orders of their superiors, the Moscow police provoked serious incidents, in particular through the use of undercover agents. In this peaceful and authorized demonstration, more than 500 people were arrested and even more received beatings.

A large number of photos, videos, eye-witness accounts and medical certificates confirm that the police acted illegally. However, although many citizens and defenders of human rights lodged complaints with the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia and with the Commission of Inquiry, no charges for abuse of power on the part of members of the police force or for obstructing the conduct of an authorized mass event were made.

The authorities were very well able to use the events of May 6 to launch an unprecedented campaign of repression and criminalization against the opposition. In the months of May and June, 12 people were charged with "breach of public order" and two others were under investigation. All the charges come under section 212 of the Criminal Code ("breaches of public order") or even under article 318 ("use of force against a representative of the security forces").

Many activists, including two famous figures of the opposition in Russia, Sergei Udaltsov and Alexei Navalnyi, have been invited to be questioned in their capacity as witnesses (and as the methods of the Russian police have taught us, you can fairly easily go from this category to that of being the accused).

There is already no longer any doubt that the authorities are mounting the most important political affair in recent years. According to the information obtained from the Commission of Inquiry of the Prosecutor General's Office, 160 witnesses are involved in the investigation and over 1,250 people have already been questioned with a view to being charged.

The number of persons already arrested or who are likely to be could come to several hundred, according to some estimates.

Only solidarity actions involving thousands of supporters around the world can help to counter such a development.

In Moscow, the May 6 Committee has already begun its work. It is a citizens' initiative which demands an end to these shameful charges and to the repression. The active members of the May 6 Committee - who represent different organizations, political, civic and for the defence of human rights - maintain permanent contact with the counsel for the accused, conduct a campaign of information and organize actions against police repression. We appeal to political and human rights organizations around the world. It is not only the fate of dozens of innocent demonstrators who are or soon will be in prison that depends on your solidarity and your willingness to act. The future of the movement of contestation in Russia depends on our ability to repel the repressive assault by the authorities.

Stop the wave of repression against the opposition

Our strength lies in solidarity!