

## **Human Rights Defender Natalja Estemirova killed**

*On 15th of July 2009 Natalja Estemirova, one of the strongest defenders of human rights in the war-torn republic of Chechnya, was abducted not far from her house. Her body was found later the same day just over the border in Ingushetia.*

*Pax Christi Flanders has worked with Natalja on several occasions. Pax Christi Flanders sent the following message of solidarity and prayers to her colleagues of Memorial, the Russian human rights organisation she was working with.*

### **Message from Pax Christi Flanders addressed to Memorial**

Dear friends,

With great sadness Pax Christi Flanders learned of the cruel murder of Natalja, who was dear to us as a sister. She has given her life in service to peace and justice in her country that was so gravely suffering under war, terror and repression.

We got to know Natalja at a seminar in Saint-Petersburg in 2003. She had her 9-year old daughter Lana with her. She impressed us with her tranquillity, perseverance, and feeling for justice and truth. At the end of September 2004, Natalja joined us for the Flemish Peace Week as one of the most impressive guest speakers addressing the concept, “Women as force for peace”. It was a very intensive week in Belgium; one which we will never forget.

She wanted to continue her dangerous job of pursuing truth and justice at any cost. Thanks to her never-ending energy, she collected fact after fact, story after story, and picture after picture, in order to compile huge reports on the deplorable human rights situation in her home country. Our organisation used these reports with a great appreciation of her work.

We at Pax Christi Flanders invited her to address several conferences here in Belgium; she was always well-prepared and could provide any audience with trustworthy information. We will miss her very much. We wish you, her

colleagues and friends, and daughter Lana, and other family members strength and courage in these days of mourning and grief. We are with you.

We will also continue our work in order to bring justice to people in the Russian Federation. We call upon all forces to join hands to stop the brutal violations. We call upon the Russian and Chechen governments to protect those who peacefully and honestly defend human rights.

Yours sincerely and with peaceful greetings,

Jo Hanssens, President Pax Christi Flanders  
Josée Goethals, chairman Working Group Eastern-Europe  
Annemarie Gielen, Department Violence Prevention/ Eastern-Europe

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