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## **Re-Defining Human Rights in the Russian Federation: a Reaction to new Challenges or a Retrogression?**

In the spring of 2006, Vladimir Putin, Russian Patriarch Alexei II, and Svetlana Vasilenko, the head of the Russian Union of Writers, welcomed the delegates of the X. World Russian People's Council. The highlight of this event was Patriarch Alexei's rejection of the UN Human Rights Declaration as "immoral". The Patriarch argued for the urgency of re-defining human rights in a Russian context as a result of globalization and the threat of a possible "clash of civilizations". He presented a "Declaration of Human Rights and Dignity" which tied human freedom and dignity to the indi-

vidual's moral behaviour, and made Russian religious tradition the standard. Former Soviet dissident and Nobel Prize winner, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, soon declared his solidarity with the Patriarch's Declaration, agreeing that Russian traditional spiritual values should define human rights in that country. He added that human rights should not threaten the Motherland, or serve to insult other people's religious or national sentiments. The Russian Federation's very recent co-sponsorship of the UN HRC's resolution A/HRC/21/L2 about the role of traditional values in the promotion of human rights appears to be a move in the same direction.

In the name of averting invasive outside influences—allegedly the result

of globalization and even neo-colonialism—Russian cultural, religious and political figures seem to be joining forces in curtailing what had appeared to be a worldwide consensus on the universality of human rights. Using the language of recent sociological studies or phenomena, a sense of crisis is created by which these modifications to human rights seem to be the reaction to contingent factors. However, the intellectual, political and religious roots of a “Russian” understanding of human rights may go as far back as Imperial Russia, where Christian values and traditions were taken into consideration in the definition of individual rights. Moreover, during the secular rule of the Soviet Union (1917-1991), dissidents such as Nikolai Berdyaev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn fought for a re-definition of the rights of the individual in a way that would reflect traditional moral principles. As the notion of human rights made crucial advances mostly in the past century, it is important to look at how this evolution was reflected in Russian thought. In my paper I will examine salient 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian intellectual and religious cultures which might have served as a background

to current re-definitions of human rights in the Russian Federation. How did intellectuals and religious figures previously argue for a modification of the (individual or) human rights concept? How did writers and thinkers interact with the church in these debates? What role did they all play in the state, and how did the state react to their proposals or criticism? Are the current attempts to redraft human rights according to tradition indeed a reaction to current threats or retrogression to these older concepts of human rights and freedoms?