Russian Ambassador to UN Vitaly Churkin Passes Away at 64

New York, February 21 (RHC)-- The Russian Foreign Ministry says the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin has "died suddenly" in New York, just one day before his 65th birthday. The ministry said in a statement on Monday that Churkin died after being taken ill at work, but gave no details on the circumstances of his death.

"We'd like to express our sincere condolences to Vitaly Churkin's family," the Russian Foreign Ministry said but declined to comment on reports that Churkin had been taken to hospital shortly before his death. Earlier, Russia's deputy UN ambassador, Vladimir Safronkov, told The Associated Press that Churkin was rushed to a hospital in New York, where he died.

Russian news agencies cited the Kremlin spokesman as saying that President Vladimir Putin was "deeply upset" by Churkin's death. "The head of state highly valued Churkin's professionalism and diplomatic talent," Dmitry Peskov said.

Meanwhile, Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for the UN Secretary General's office, offered his condolences. "We mourn Ambassador Churkin. He has been such a regular presence here that I am actually quite stunned. Our thoughts go to his family, to his friends and to his government."

Before being appointed to represent Russia at the United Nations on May 1, 2006, Churkin was

Ambassador at Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation between 2003 and 2006. He was Russia's Ambassador to Canada from 1998 to 2003, Ambassador to Belgium and Liaison Ambassador to NATO and the Western European Union (WEU) between 1994 and 1998.

Churkin also served as Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation to the talks on Former Yugoslavia (1992-1994).

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