

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Brief summary of concerns about human rights violations in the Chechen Republic

RECENT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS¹

Massive human rights violations have taken place within the context of the armed conflict in the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic. Since the conflict broke out in December 1994, 20,000 to 30,000 civilians have been killed in the conflict, many of them as a result of indiscriminate attacks by Russian Federation federal forces on densely populated, residential areas. The Russian Presidential Commission for Human Rights estimates that the sum total of war-related deaths in the capital Grozny alone can be estimated as approximately 27,000 people. A reported 1,350 persons have “disappeared” during the conflict.

From the very beginning of the conflict Russia has shown disregard for the rules governing armed conflict and the protection of the civilian population (see *Armed conflict in the Chechen Republic: seeds of human rights violations sown in peacetime* AI Index: EUR 46/10/95). In addition, the Russian Government did not comply with its commitments to protect human rights in times of armed conflicts, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security adopted in December 1994, and the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly Opinion 193 (1996) on Russia’s request for membership of the Council of Europe.

Men, women and children have been victims of extrajudicial executions, hostage-taking, torture and ill-treatment in detention, particularly in so-called “filtration camps.” Hundreds of people have been detained without trial. Allegations of rape have been made against the Russian forces. Given below are just a few recent examples of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights during the conflict:

Events at Samashki

In March 1996, Russian military action to root out Chechen fighters escalated in Samashki, near Grozny, which itself had been the scene of heavy bombing and massive civilian casualties at the start of the conflict between December 1994 and March 1995. In an earlier attempt to capture Samashki, in April 1995, more than 250 civilians, including women and children, were reportedly killed by Russian forces, many of whom have been the victim of indiscriminate killings or extrajudicial executions. Residents were trapped in their homes as Russian troops reportedly burnt their houses down and threw grenades into basements where many had taken cover. Up until 10 April 1995, soldiers at Interior Ministry

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checkpoints did not allow removal of the wounded from the village nor access by doctors and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As a result, a number of wounded civilians died. In March 1996 the attack on the town took the form of a full-scale assault with rockets and shells, with apparent disregard for the civilians trapped in the town. Civilians who managed to escape from the settlement reported that 3,000 to 4,000 civilians were sheltering in cellars and basements. They estimated that up to 600 people had been killed, as a result of an indiscriminate attack.

Events at Sernovodsk

The Chechen town of Sernovodsk also came under intensive artillery attack in early March 1996. Russian forces, claiming Chechen fighters had set up a base there, bombarded the town, again without any apparent concern for the lives of the trapped civilian population. Between 10,000 and 16,000 people were believed to have fled Sernovodsk at this time. However, 7,000 civilians remained. Many of those who stayed in the town were persons displaced by the conflict from elsewhere in Chechnya. Hundreds were killed and injured in an indiscriminate military action. Witnesses claimed that the corpses of those killed were left on the streets for days because residents were unable to collect them for burial under heavy sniper fire by the Russian army. Representatives of the ICRC were not permitted access to the town during the attack by the Russian military authorities. Russian troops who entered Sernovodsk were also reported to have carried out extrajudicial executions. One eye-witness said that he saw a young woman arrested on the street by several soldiers who took her to a nearby house, where later her dead body was found.

“Filtration Camps”

Men between the ages of 16 and 55 were not allowed to leave Sernovodsk freely under any circumstances, but were moved to “filtration camps”. There have been reports of widespread beatings and torture, including electric shocks, of detainees held in such camps throughout the war in Chechnya. According to reports, Magomed Maksharipovich Meyriyev, an ethnic Ingush, was punched, kicked and beaten with rifle butts and truncheons by Russian soldiers at various locations, including Mozdok and Pyatigorsk camps, while detained from 3 January to 15 February 1995. He was also attacked and bitten by an Alsatian guard dog, which was encouraged by the Russian soldiers. He was eventually released with 14 other people who had also reportedly been beaten.

According to witnesses, Hasan Khamidov, from the village of Terskoe, was subjected to torture while he was detained at the “filtration camp” in Mozdok: the Russian guards, reportedly, cut his feet with bayonet knife and burned him with a cigarette butts. Ruslan Hajiev, a bank officer from Grozny, was also reportedly beaten with club over his head during interrogations at two locations - the camps in Mozdok and Stavropol. He reportedly lost his sight as a result of the beatings.

Another resident of Grozny, Magomed-Rashid Akhmetovich Pliev, an Ingush journalist, was reportedly subjected to electric shock during his detention in the “filtration camp” in Mozdok in January 1995. The Russian soldiers who interrogated him tried to force him to confess to being a fighter. He was released on 24 January 1995.

The latest report (for 1994-1995) of the Russian Presidential Commission on Human Rights, formerly headed by Sergey Kovalyov, states that during the period up to 25 January 1995, when the majority of detentions took place, civilians were detained and brought to the “filtration camps” without being officially charged or their detention acknowledged in any way. Beginning in February 1995, when detention orders began to be written up in some instances, they were processed in violation of existing Russian laws. In the majority of cases, the orders contained references to the Russian President’s Decree “On Measures to Prevent Vagrancy and Begging” of 2 November 1993, which, in violation of the law, was applied to legal residents of the Chechen Republic, possessing proper identification papers. Reference to this Decree allowed for extending the period of detention without charge to nine days, in violation of the 48-hour maximum period provided in the Russian Constitution or the 72-hour maximum period permitted by the Code of Criminal Procedure. According to official information, a total of 1,325 persons passed through the “filtration camps” between 11 December 1994 and 22 July 1995. At present, according to witnesses, every Russian army checkpoint in Chechnya has a common list of 958 names of people wanted for “filtration”, and in addition every checkpoint has created its own list of local residents to be detained and transferred to “filtration camps”.

Rape

Soldiers have also allegedly committed rape. In January 1995 four masked Russian soldiers entered the house of Olga Sokulova in the village of Assinovskaya, ransacked it and raped her. No investigation has taken place.

It was reported that a young internally displaced woman was abducted and raped by several Russian inebriated soldiers in Sernovodsk in early October 1995.

According to reports, there have been some cases of use of rape by Russian military and internal forces as a form of punishment against residents of villages which were believed to support the Chechen fighters.

Hostage-taking

Forces loyal to Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev have also been responsible for human rights abuses. In June 1995 a group of armed Chechens killed more than 100 civilians in the southern Russian town of Budennovsk when they took some 1,000 people hostage at the local hospital. Some hostages were reportedly forced to act as human shields for Chechen fighters during a subsequent assault on the hospital by Russian government forces. Hostage-taking is prohibited under international law in all circumstances.

Hostages were also taken in a number of separate incidents in early 1996. On 9 January a group of Chechens calling itself "Lone Wolf" entered the southern Russian town of Kizlyar in Dagestan and took over the central hospital and adjoining maternity home. Civilians from apartment blocks surrounding the medical complex were forced into the hospital. The group's leader, Salman Raduyev, said the hostages would be shot if Russian troops did not withdraw from the Chechen Republic. At the same time hostages were also taken by Chechen fighters at an electrical plant near Grozny. Hostages taken in Kizlyar by Chechen fighters were than taken to the village of Pervomaiskoye.

In an attempt to rescue the hostages, on and around 19 January, the Russian army launched heavy artillery and Grad rocket attacks on the village, apparently signalling the intention to end the hostage crisis by resorting to an indiscriminate attack, without regard for the lives of the civilians in the village and the hostages themselves. The Russian army reportedly secured the freedom of 82 hostages from Pervomaiskoye; the remaining hostages were later freed by the Chechen fighters. The number of civilian casualties remained unknown because the Russian army did not permit journalists and independent observers access to the village during the attack and until after dead bodies of civilians were reportedly cleared from the streets by Russian soldiers.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION

Despite two peace initiatives, in July 1995 and in March 1996, the conflict continues and human rights violations against civilians continue to be committed in the Chechen Republic at present. While Amnesty International takes no position on the reason for armed conflicts, or the resort to the use of force *per se*, it does call on all parties to a conflict to abide by international humanitarian law. The organization reports on and takes action against specific human rights abuses occurring in situation of conflict, including deliberate or indiscriminate killing of civilians, detention without charges or trial, the torture, ill-treatment or extrajudicial execution of persons detained, including soldiers or other combatants who are *hors de combat*, the use of the death penalty, the taking of hostages or the "disappearances" or abduction of any person.

Amnesty International is urging the Russian authorities to hold a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the wide range of human rights abuses which have occurred during the conflict in the Chechen Republic and to bring those responsible to justice.

The organization is urging the Russian Government to comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians during armed conflict.

Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to comply with its commitments to protect human rights in times of armed conflicts, including the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security adopted in December 1994. In addition, Amnesty International is urging the Russian Government to comply with its commitments on respect for human rights, given to the Council of Europe upon Russia's acceptance to the Council in February 1996, including the commitment to "respect strictly

the provisions of international humanitarian law, including in cases of armed conflicts on its territory”.

It continues to call on all parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian law.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

- 1. Condemn all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law which continue to be committed in the context of the armed conflict in Chechnya.**
- 2. Demand assurances from the Russian Government that no further indiscriminate military attacks on Chechen towns and villages take place in the future and no indiscriminate killings of civilians occur as a result of these attacks.**
- 3. Call on the Russian authorities to ensure that any individual suspected of committing, participating in, or ordering human rights violations against combatants and non-combatants, including unlawful killings or torture and ill-treatment be identified and brought to justice.**
- 4. Call on the Russian Federation to take other effective steps to prevent the recurrence of such abuses by revising rules of engagement for armed forces, training of armed forces and disciplinary procedures.**
- 5. Call for immediate and unrestricted access to all areas of fighting for representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and all other humanitarian organizations.**
- 6. Call on the Russian Government to ensure full and appropriate access to detainees, especially in the “filtration camps”, by the ICRC. As the organization mandated to work for the observance of humanitarian law, its work in visiting and registering prisoners is an important step in ensuring that the safeguards envisaged under humanitarian law are respected and obeyed.**
- 7. Demand assurances from the Russian authorities that any person detained and taken to a “filtration camp” will not be subjected to torture and ill-treatment, or any other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Such acts are specifically forbidden by international human rights treaties to which Russia is bound, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as international humanitarian law.**

8. Request the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to visit without delay the Chechen Republic and to report back to the General Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights.

9. Request the Secretary-General to report on the situation of human rights in the Republic of Chechnya during its 53rd session under agenda item 10 and make appropriate recommendations for the improvement of the situation.