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The Situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia Deteriorates

27/4/04

New Evidence of Enforced Disappearances, Rape, Torture, and Extrajudicial Executions

Joint Statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and Memorial

April 8, 2004

The October 2003 presidential elections in the Chechen Republic, hailed by the Russian government as a major step toward normalization there, have not broken the cycle of violence and abuse in the region. Enforced "disappearances," rape, torture and extrajudicial executions by federal troops and Chechen fighters are everyday occurrences in Chechnya. Similar violence is on the increase in Ingushetia. As part of the "normalization" process, the Russian government also continues to close tent camps in Ingushetia and to use a combination of pressure and inducements to move vulnerable internally displaced persons back to Chechnya.

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Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and Memorial, call on the government of the Russian Federation to take immediate steps to bring an end to the human rights abuses in Chechnya and Ingushetia. The organizations urge the international community to hold the Russian government to its obligations under international human rights standards. In particular, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights should adopt a strong resolution to this effect regarding the situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia. A failure to unequivocally denounce gross and systematic violations of human rights would diminish and reduce the Commission's moral authority.

Chechnya

In early 2004, Russian troops and Chechen fighters continued to commit serious human rights violations on a regular basis in Chechnya. However, a new and increasingly militant armed group under the command of the son of Chechnya's President Akhmad Kadyrov, popularly known as the *Kadyrovtsy*, are blamed for an increasing portion of the "disappearances" and many Chechens say they fear the *Kadyrovtsy* more than federal troops.

According to Memorial, which systematically monitors the situation in approximately one third of Chechnya's territory, in the first quarter of 2004, 78

people were abducted in Chechnya, 41 of whom subsequently "disappeared." At least 30 civilians died as a result of the armed conflict in the same period. Some recent abuses documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Memorial include:

- At 2:00 a.m. on March 18, 2004, masked men in camouflage uniforms entered the home of the Khambulatov family in the village of Naurskaya in Northern Chechnya and detained twenty-four-year-old Timur Khambulatov. According to relatives, the intruders identified themselves as officials of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and said that they were taking Timur Khambulatov to the local police station on suspicion of belonging to an illegal armed group. Later that morning, Timur Khambulatov died in custody. Video footage of his dead body, which Memorial obtained from relatives, showed a mutilated corpse with marks that were consistent with previously reported evidence of torture.
- At around 2:00 a.m. on March 27, 2004, eight military vehicles entered the village of Duba-Yurt in the Shali region, carrying a large group of masked men in camouflage uniforms. The men conducted a targeted raid on nineteen houses and detained eleven men aged between twenty-eight and forty-four. Shortly after, the armed men released three of the men near the village but the other eight men have "disappeared." Unofficial sources have told relatives that the eight men are held at the Russian military base in Khankala. The procuracy denies they are held there.

In a report to be released next week, Thursday April 15, 2004, the British charity Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture provides the first-ever substantial body of reliable evidence on the use of rape in the armed conflict in Chechnya. The report, entitled "Rape and Other Torture in the Chechnya Conflict,"¹ is based on medical and psychological documentation of thirty-five asylum seekers from the Chechnya conflict at the Medical Foundation's treatment centre in London, including sixteen men and nineteen women. During assessment and treatment, sixteen women and one man disclosed rape to clinicians at the Medical Foundation. In thirteen of these cases, the alleged perpetrators were Russian soldiers, in three cases they were said to be Russian police officers, and in one Chechen rebels. Of the seventeen rape victims, ten were Chechens, five of mixed Chechen-Russian parentage (including the woman who described being raped by Chechen fighters), and two were Russians. All rape survivors were interviewed by professionals with years of experience interviewing victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The Medical Foundation found their testimony reliable and consistent with that of other rape survivors.

Human rights groups have long suspected that sexual violence in the Chechnya conflict was widespread but have faced major difficulties documenting such cases due to the stigma attached to the issue. Indeed, the Medical Foundation found that more than half of the rape victims felt shame or stigma, even at a far distance from the abusive events, because of what they had endured. One female victim told the Medical Foundation said she had been insulted and physically attacked by a woman in her own community when it became known she had been raped.

In its report, the Medical Foundation also documents other forms of torture and ill-

treatment, including repeated kicking, beating and burning. Its medical doctors have documented shoulder dislocations, fractures, and damaged kidneys. These reports are consistent with information on torture practices in Chechnya gathered by the other signatories to this statement.

The Situation of Internally Displaced Persons

The Russian government continues to pressure thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in tent camps in Ingushetia into returning to Chechnya, ignoring their well-founded fears about the security situation there. The government has, for the most part, failed to fulfil promises to provide IDPs who wish to stay in Ingushetia with alternative accommodation there. Government-run temporary accommodation centers in Grozny, where many of the returnees end up living, are inadequate.

On 1 April, the government closed the Sputnik IDP camp—the fourth large tent camp in Ingushetia to be closed in six months. IDPs from the camp told Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Memorial that Russian and Chechen officials had used a combination of threats and incentives to encourage them to return to Chechnya. They said officials promised them compensation for lost property should they return, and warned they would lose their right to humanitarian aid if they did not. They also said law enforcement officials threatened to plant bullets or narcotics on them if they did not leave. Researchers of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Memorial found that similar carrot-and-stick tactics are now used in Satsita, the only remaining tent camp in Ingushetia.

Most IDPs forced out of the tent camps and back to Chechnya find shelter in so-called temporary accommodation centers (TACs). On visits to four temporary accommodation centers in Grozny in late March, Human Rights Watch and Memorial researchers found that the conditions at the TACs do not meet international standards. In each TAC, rooms were overcrowded with eight or more persons sharing a fourteen-square meter room designed for six. There was no running water or functioning sewage system in any of them, and humanitarian food supplies were said to be irregular and insufficient, as many of the IDPs said they did not receive aid from humanitarian agencies.

The researchers also found that the Russian government is failing to meet its promise to compensate returning IDPs for lost property. None of the more than a dozen IDPs interviewed at TACs in Grozny had received compensation. Most complained that their papers were not being processed or that their names had mysteriously disappeared from the lists of those entitled to compensation.

The Situation in Ingushetia

The human rights violations that have long been the hallmark of the Chechnya conflict are increasingly spilling over into Ingushetia. Memorial has received dozens of reports of “disappearances” in 2004 alone. Human rights groups have also documented a number of summary executions in recent months and attacks against civilians resulting in deaths and serious injuries.

Serious human rights violations documented by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Memorial during recent research in Ingushetia, include:

- On March 11, 2004, armed men stopped the car of Rashid Ozdov, an Ingush deputy prosecutor, near the village of Verkhnye Achaluki and detained him. Witnesses have told his relatives that he was first taken to FSB headquarters in Magas, the capital of Ingushetia, and was then transferred to the Russian military base at Khankala in Chechnya, where he is being held under a different name. The procuracy of Ingushetia opened a criminal case into the abduction on March 15, but to date there has been no official confirmation of his whereabouts. According to relatives, Rashid Ozdov had been involved in investigating unlawful activity by the FSB.
- On March 25, 2004, at approximately 10:30 p.m., a Russian military helicopter opened fire on a passenger car parked at a riverbank near the Ingush village of Sleptsovskaya in what appeared to be a deliberate attack against unarmed civilians. When the four passengers ran from the vehicle, the helicopter targeted them with rockets. One of the passengers, twenty-year-old Musa Khamkhev, was killed on the spot. Two other passengers, both teenagers, suffered serious wounds and were taken to the local hospital. One of them, sixteen-year-old Ibragim Khashagulgov, died from his injuries a week later. The condition of the third young man remains serious. The condition of the fourth passenger is not known. The procuracy of Ingushetia has opened a criminal investigation into the incident.
- On March 2, 2004, at around 5:00 p.m., fifty-one-year-old Isa Khazbiev, his wife and daughter were driving near his home village of Altievo. The family witnessed armed men in three cars force another car to stop. The armed men dragged out a passenger from the car they had stopped, and threw him on the ground. When the passenger tried to crawl away the armed men shot him dead. Khazbiev stopped his car about forty meters away, scared to move backward or forward. As he stopped, three of the armed men fired four shots at his car without warning. Khazbiev was wounded in the shoulder and leg. His twenty-four-year-old daughter was wounded in the neck and head, and died in a hospital three days later. Memorial later found evidence that the armed men belonged to the Ingush FSB.

¹ Doctor Charlotte Granville-Chapman, "Rape and Other Torture in the Chechnya Conflict: Documented Evidence From Asylum Seekers Arriving in the United Kingdom," Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, London, April 2004. The report will be available at: www.torturecare.org.uk or via the press office of the Medical Foundation at telephone number +44 [0] 20 7697 7792.



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