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Russian Federation: No end to gross human rights violations in Russia's North Caucasus

Amnesty International releases new findings in lead up to EU-Russia summit

Amnesty International today released disturbing new findings from its latest field research mission which show there is no end to gross human rights violations in Chechnya and Ingushetia with the Russian authorities implicated in the torture, abduction and secret detention of civilians. Amnesty International says Russia's "war on terror" is being used as an excuse for systematic human rights abuses.

The human rights organisation published details of abuses documented by its researchers who returned from the region this week. Their findings were released today simultaneously in London, Brussels and Moscow (see details below) in the lead-up to next week's EU-Russia summit in London on Tuesday 4 October 2005.

In a briefing paper, Amnesty International said it had detected a new trend in the human rights abuses in the North Caucasus. People are reportedly being arbitrarily detained and held in incommunicado detention, where they are subjected to torture and ill-treatment, in order to force them to confess to crimes that they have not committed. Once they have signed a "confession" they are reportedly transferred to another detention facility where they have access to a lawyer of their choice and relatives; but the confession seems to be enough "evidence" to secure their conviction.

Amnesty International says the European Union, as a collective body committed to upholding basic human rights, cannot ignore these findings. It calls upon the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, representing the EU Presidency at next week's summit, to make it clear to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the torture and "disappearance" of men and women is inexcusable and must stop.

Amnesty International also calls upon Russian President Vladimir Putin to make a clear statement to the EU and give public assurances that his government will take immediate action to halt abuses and ensure effective investigations and prosecutions of those suspected of committing crimes, and affirm the Russian Federation's commitment to uphold international human rights standards.

Amnesty International's briefing paper calls upon the Russian authorities to:

Conduct effective investigations and prosecutions into cases of human rights violations in the North Caucasus;
Ensure that law enforcement agencies carry out any detentions in full accordance with international law;
Take practical steps to address the issue of missing persons and "disappeared" persons, particularly through introducing effective systems for identification and recording of bodies found and to make this information public;
Ensure the adoption by consensus of, and ratify, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Amnesty International briefing paper: *"Torture, 'disappearances' and alleged unfair trials in Russia's North Caucasus"* available from 07.00 GMT on <http://www.amnesty.org> and <http://www.amnesty-eu.org>

Note for editors:

A joint press conference between Amnesty International and the Memorial Human Rights Centre is being held in Moscow today at 07.00 GMT (11.00 Moscow time) 30 September 2005, at which Amnesty International's findings will be released, and Memorial Human Rights Centre will discuss the Russian government's record in implementing decisions of the European Court of Human Rights on Chechnya.

Amnesty International researchers Victoria Webb and Friederike Behr, who carried out the mission in Ingushetia, will be available in London on Monday 3 October 2005 for media interviews. Audiovisual material gathered in the field will also be available then.

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