

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

News Flash

AI Index: EUR 46/090/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 258
13 November 2003

Russian Federation/UK: UK Court decides not to extradite Chechen envoy Akhmed Zakayev

Amnesty International welcomed today's decision of Bow Street Magistrates' Court, London, to decline the request of the Russian Federation for the extradition of the Chechen envoy Akhmed Zakayev.

"The widespread use of torture and ill-treatment by the Russian authorities, as documented by Amnesty International and other human rights groups, had given rise to well-based fears for Akhmed Zakayev's physical safety if sent back to Russia," the human rights organization said.

"Torture and ill-treatment in Russian police cells, as well as the harassment of ethnic Chechens, are common and as the representative of Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov, Mr Zakayev would have been particularly vulnerable."

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of the judge that the extradition request should be declined on the grounds that Akhmed Zakayev's ethnicity and political beliefs made it likely that he would be tortured if returned to the Russian Federation. Amnesty International had also been concerned that if returned, Akhmed Zakayev would not have been given a fair trial.

During the extradition court hearings in the United Kingdom, experts and witnesses for the defence gave evidence of widespread torture of inmates in pretrial detention centres and prisons. One witness, Duk-Vakha Doshuyev, alleged that he had been tortured into providing accounts to support the Russian Federation's extradition bid. Amnesty International calls for an independent investigation of this allegation.

Background

Akhmed Zakayev, an envoy of the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, was first arrested in Copenhagen on 30 October 2002 where he was attending the World Chechen Congress. The Congress, planned well in advance, took place in the wake of the hostage-taking incident in a Moscow theatre, which left some 150 people dead. Amnesty International welcomed the decision by Denmark's Justice Ministry to refuse, due to lack of evidence, the extradition of Akhmed Zakayev. His extradition had been requested by the Russian authorities. (see EUR 46/065/2002). Akhmed Zakayev was arrested on his arrival to the UK from Copenhagen on 5 December 2002 and was later released on bail. Amnesty International urged the UK authorities not to extradite Akhmed Zakayev to the Russian Federation as he may be tortured or ill-treated there. (see EUR 46/069/2002).

Public Document

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