

11 January 2000

Further information on EXTRA 176/99 (EUR 46/42/99, 7 December 1999) - Fear for Safety**RUSSIAN FEDERATION: CHECHNYA Civilians in Grozny**

Amnesty International remains seriously concerned for the safety of up to 40,000 civilians trapped in Grozny, capital of the Chechen Republic, which is under bombardment by Russian federal forces. Few are reported to have left the city by the so-called "safe corridors" created by the Russian federal authorities.

According to reports, when people have tried to leave the city, the "safe corridors" have turned out to be unsafe. On 16 December a bus carrying fleeing civilians was reportedly attacked by Russian forces in a "safe corridor". One of the survivors, 72-year-old Lidiya Kobekova, reportedly said: "This is not a road to life, it's a road to death. The radio said there was a corridor. They were shooting, we were nearly killed." Another survivor, "Lyuba", reportedly said: "Our bus was shot at by the Russians. Four people were wounded. We had to crawl on our stomachs to avoid the gunfire and then carry on by foot."

A spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated on 9 January that there had been no significant movement out of Grozny through humanitarian corridors, but only a "trickle of people sneaking out," adding, "The fighting makes major movement impossible". On 11 January the Russian Emergencies Ministry press service reported that 6,433 inhabitants of Grozny had left the city since the beginning of the military offensive - a relatively small proportion of the city's population.

Russian General Gennady Troshev reportedly stated on 7 January that the Russian army was trying to persuade civilians to leave before the military made a push to take control of Grozny: "At the moment we are calling on these people, we are leaving leaflets in the town, we are sending Chechen envoys in there and we are guaranteeing that the safe corridors are working. In short, we are doing everything in our power to allow the residents of Grozny to leave the city." However, it was reported on 9 January that there were still some civilians in Grozny who knew nothing about the "safe corridors", or about the leaflets warning them to flee dropped by Russian federal aircraft.

The Russian authorities claimed on 10 January that there were 20,000 civilians left in Grozny, kept there by Chechen fighters as a human shield. The Chechen authorities claim that 40,000 civilians are trapped in Grozny, unable to leave due to constant Russian bombing and artillery attacks.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, to which the Russian Federation is a party, emphasize that "the civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited." (Article 13(2), Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions). All parties should respect the principle of distinction, which obliges their forces to take all measures to distinguish between civilian and military targets.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian, English or in your own language:

To the Russian authorities:

- urging them to do all in their power to enable civilians trapped in Grozny who wish to leave, to leave safely;
- urging the Russian authorities to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law by refraining from indiscriminate or direct attacks on the civilian population in or fleeing Grozny.

To the Chechen authorities and the military leadership of the armed groups (by addressing separately the Chechen authorities, Amnesty International is not taking a position on Chechnya's legal status):

- pointing out that, regardless of its current legal status, Chechnya remains bound by the international human rights and the international humanitarian law obligations of the Russian Federation, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their protocols;
- urging them to do all in their power to enable civilians trapped in Grozny who wish to leave, to leave safely;
- urging them to comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians during armed conflict, which prohibit direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects as well as indiscriminate attacks;
- asking them to inform all members of armed groups that the use of civilians as "human shields" is prohibited under international law in all circumstances.

Please make it clear in your letters that Amnesty International is addressing similar appeals to both Russian and Chechen authorities.

APPEALS TO:

Russian authorities:

Acting President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir PUTIN
Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, g. Moskva, Kreml
I.o. Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii

Faxes: +7 095 206 6277

Telegrams: Russia, Moskva, Kreml, PUTINU V.

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, Marshal Igor SERGEYEV
Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 103175 g. Moskva, ul. Myasnitskaya, 37, Ministerstvo oborony, Ministru Marsh. Sergeevu

Telegrams: Russia, Moscow, Ministerstvo oborony, Marsh. SERGEYEVU

Salutation: Dear Minister

Russian Federation Minister of Internal Affairs, Vladimir RUSHAILO
Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 117049 g. Moskva, ul. Zhitnaya, 16, Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Ministru RUSHAILO V.

Faxes: +7 095 239 0862

Telegrams: Russia, Moscow, Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, RUSHAILO V.

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Igor Ivanov
Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, g. Moskva 121200, Smolenskaya-Sennaya pl., 32/34
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del RF, Ministru IVANOVU I.

Faxes: + 7095 230 21 30

and to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

Chechen authorities: please find, or ask your section for details of, anyone acting as representative or spokesperson of the Chechen authorities in your country. Otherwise you could send telegrams or express letters to:

Chechen Representative in The Hague, Dr Aslanbek Kadiev, Javastraat 40, 2544xx
The Hague, Netherlands

Telegrams: Dr Kadiev, Javastraat 40, The Hague, Netherlands

Salutation: Dear Dr Kadiev

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 February 2000.