

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.00 HRS GMT 3 APRIL 2000**

## **Chechnya: the Council of Europe must support an international investigation into human rights abuses**

Following its meeting in January, where Russia was reminded of its obligations as a member state and urged to respect human rights in Chechnya, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is due to meet early this to evaluate Russia's progress in this aspect.

"While AI does not take a position on the question of membership of governments to international bodies, the Council of Europe has a duty to its own human rights standards," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has continued to monitor the situation in Chechnya and a recent mission to Ingushetia has revealed that the abuses against Chechen civilians have not stopped:

- **arbitrary arrest:** Amnesty International received reports stating that Chechen civilians are detained at random by Russian forces at checkpoints. Without following any international legal standards, they are placed in secret "filtration" camps where they run the risk of being tortured. Adam Abubakarov, 16, was placed in a secret "filtration" camp known as the "Internat" in Urus-Martan following his arrest in February on suspicion of being a Chechen fighter because he had blisters on his hands. His father told Amnesty International that the blisters were a result of helping his grandparents dig in the garden. He is currently in detention, reportedly at a secret detention facility in the village of Znamenskoye.

- **torture, ill-treatment and deaths in detention:** detainees in "filtration" camps - - men, women and children - - are routinely and systematically tortured: they are raped, beaten with hammers and clubs, tortured with *electric shocks and tear gas, their teeth are sawn off and some are simultaneously beaten around both ears to burst the ear-drums*. A former detainee described the torture and rape of a 14-year old girl by guards in the Chernokozovo "filtration" camp. She subsequently died.

- **indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians:** Chechen civilians, including medical personnel, continue to be the target of military attacks by Russian forces. In March a group of up to 60 civilians in the village of Samashki, mostly women and children, were promised a "safe corridor" for one day by Russian forces to allow them to collect food. Despite these assurances, the group came under artillery attack and at least three women were killed and five were wounded.

- **journalists denied access to Chechnya:** the media is being denied access to Chechnya, journalists who do manage to gain access to the republic, like Andrey Babitsky, run the risk of being detained in "filtration" camps, where they could face torture and ill-treatment.

- **no "openness" to international observers:** despite claims by Russian authorities that visits by international delegations to "filtration" camps have failed to uncover evidence of abuses of human rights, Amnesty International has collected testimonies that suggest that measures were taken to prevent international delegations from seeing the truth about "filtration" camps. In

“Internat” camp detainees were allegedly placed in a bus in a distant corner of the camp when the visit of an international delegation was expected. In addition, the organization has collected numerous and corroborating testimonies from civilians who have managed to escape from, or have been bought out of, secret camps established by Russian forces, which have not been under such international scrutiny.

On 29 March Russia’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs outlined to the UN Commission on Human Rights the steps taken by the Russian authorities to address international demands to investigate allegations of human rights violations in Chechnya, *while stating that Russia does not accept any appeals for international inquiries*. Amnesty International, however, knows of only one prosecution resulting from reports of abuses committed against Chechen civilians.

“Only an international investigation can ensure justice for the victims”, Amnesty International said today.

ENDS.../

\*\*\*\*\*

**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London on + 44 171 413 5566**