



Press Release from Amnesty International EU Office

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EU-Russia summit: stop turning a blind eye to human rights abuses in Chechnya
Amnesty International calls on the EU to back international investigation

As EU leaders prepare to meet the Russian President Vladimir Putin at their summit in Stockholm, Amnesty International demands that they send the Russian leader home with a clear message.

"EU leaders must press the Russian President to agree to an international investigation into human rights abuses in Chechnya, as the only way to achieve justice for the victims. The EU should stop pretending that it can achieve normal relations with Russia while human rights abuses against Chechen civilians continue, and while the Russian government repeatedly refuses access to independent human rights monitors," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

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"The government of the Russian Federation has proved that it lacks the political will to investigate human rights abuses in Chechnya. It continues to reject the findings of independent human rights organizations on torture and ill-treatment. We are convinced that any domestic investigations into claims of human rights abuses will prove ineffective," he said.

Amnesty International calls on EU leaders to obtain specific commitments from the Russian President:

- * Full cooperation with an international investigation into crimes committed in Chechnya;
- * Immediate access to Chechnya for independent human rights monitors;
- * Full cooperation with UN human rights experts.

The EU led moves last year at the UN Commission on Human Rights to urge Russia to set up an independent Commission of Inquiry and to allow UN Special Rapporteurs and representatives into Chechnya.

"However, the EU has stood by for a year and watched the Russian government simply ignore these requests. The real agenda for the Stockholm summit should be an international inquiry into what has been

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going on in Chechnya," Amnesty International stated.

"The EU masks its failure to obtain concrete commitments from Russia by emphasising the need for constructive EU-Russia relations. But there can be no constructive engagement without human rights accountability. Any political and economic considerations for inaction on the part of the EU governments cannot come first when the lives of ordinary civilians are at stake," the organization said.

Human rights abuses against civilians in Chechnya continue, as well as against ethnic Chechens in other parts of Russia. Despite Russian government assurances that all crimes against civilians will be investigated, the perpetrators remain unpunished. Neither of the bodies established by the Russian authorities – the National Public Commission, or the Office of the Special Representative of the President on Human Rights and Freedoms in the Chechen Republic – have a mandate to undertake investigations.

"It is time for the host of the EU summit, Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson and his EU partners to face the fact that yet another permanent member of the UN Security Council is making a mockery of the UN's human rights system," said Amnesty International.

Background

The establishment of an international Commission of Inquiry during the current session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva is the next logical and necessary step following an EU-led initiative at the last year's session of the Commission, which resulted in the adoption of a

resolution.

The EU had led the call, reflected in the Commission's resolution, for Russia to set up a national, broad-based and independent Commission of Inquiry to establish the truth about alleged abuses, identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Russia was also requested to extend invitations without delay to the UN's Special Rapporteurs and representatives to visit Chechnya and surrounding republics.

The Russian government has largely ignored these requests. Furthermore, the Russian authorities has openly stated recently in an official statement of March 2001, which was distributed to all governments - members of the UN Commission on Human Rights: "Thus, the aforementioned resolution is totally unacceptable to Russia."

In the meantime between the two sessions of the Commission, Amnesty International continued to document violations by Russian forces in Chechnya, including: arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, "disappearance", and indiscriminate or direct attacks on civilians during military operations.

These practices have not lessened since the early months of the war, but rather have become a routine part of Russian operations. Chechen fighters violated humanitarian law by failing to protect civilian immunity during attacks on Russian positions, by attacking civilians who work in the local administration in Chechnya, and by ill-treating and extrajudicially executing Russian soldiers they have captured.

Russian forces on "cleansing operations" (in Russian, zachistka) in towns and villages continue to arbitrarily arrest and use disproportionate force against civilians. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, by the end of the summer 15,000 people in Chechnya had been detained in relation to the conflict.

Most are reportedly beaten or subjected to torture while held in incommunicado detention; their relatives are almost always extorted for bribes in exchange for their release. Hundreds of others simply "disappear" in custody. Bombing and shelling continued in several districts, and land mines have killed and maimed countless civilians. Ethnic Chechens continue to be targetted by the Russian authorities, not only inside Chechnya but throughout the Russian Federation.

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