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## **Chechnya: Six years on -- crimes without punishment**

*On the sixth anniversary of the start of the first Chechen war, Amnesty International today called upon the international community to apply pressure on Russia to bring to justice those accused of human rights abuses in the breakaway republic.*

*On 11 December 1994 Russian forces invaded Chechnya in an attempt to prevent the secession of the republic. The conflict ended two years later. Although the conflict saw widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law, no military personnel have been prosecuted for crimes against civilians.*

*It is feared that a similar culture of impunity will apply to abuses carried out in the course of the current war in Chechnya, launched in September 1999. Of 517 criminal cases reported by the Russian authorities to have been initiated against Russian servicemen, it is reported that the vast majority are related to internal matters, such as bullying in the army, whilst human rights violations against civilians have prompted a meagre 20 cases. Of those, Amnesty International is unaware of any that have yet reached court, while the specific nature of the charges have not been made public.*

*As far as Amnesty International is aware, no criminal cases have been initiated into the indiscriminate use of military force, any of the massacres of civilians documented by human rights organizations, or any cases of arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment in the "filtration camps."*

*"This week we celebrate the 52nd anniversary of the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and yet every day, even as we celebrate this milestone, the most basic rights of the people living in Chechnya are being violated," Amnesty International said. "The Russian government 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."*

*Amnesty International last year called upon the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to instigate an international investigation into allegations of abuses in Chechnya – a call that went unheeded. The UN Commission called merely for a national, broad-based, independent commission to be established. One year on, none of the bodies established by the Russian authorities in response – the National Public Commission, and the Office of the Special Representative of the President on Human Rights and Freedoms in the Chechen Republic – has been able to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.*

*Amnesty International is convinced that any national inquiry will prove ineffective. On 22 September the Special Representative of the President stated that no complaints of torture had been received from detainees at Chernokozovo or other detention centres, although he acknowledged that many detainees might be afraid to speak up and that his office would have to improve its methodology. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have documented numerous cases of torture and ill-treatment at Chernokozovo and other "filtration camps," including:*

- Systematic beatings with clubs and hammers*
- The rape of men, women and children*
- The use of electric shock and tear gas*
- The filing of detainees' teeth*

*"Russia's seat on the UN Security Council must not mean it be allowed to evade scrutiny of its human rights record," Amnesty International stated. "We reiterate that the international community, as a matter of urgency, must initiate an international investigation into all crimes against Chechen civilians as the only effective way to ensure justice for the victims."*

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