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Russian Federation: No forcible return of displaced Chechens to Chechnya until security is guaranteed

Amnesty International strongly condemns any attempts to return internally displaced persons to Chechnya unless they can be guaranteed security. The human rights organization voiced its concern following reports that the Russian authorities are planning to close camps in Ingushetia for civilians who fled the fighting in the Chechen Republic by the end of January 2003, starting with Aki Yurt camp on 1st of December.

"If sent back, most of these people will not only find their homes looted or destroyed, without conditions for even basic subsistence, but will be put at risk of torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, 'disappearance' and extrajudicial execution," Amnesty International warned.

Hundreds of thousands of people have sought refuge in neighbouring republics as a result of the wars and continuing conflict in Chechnya in the past decade. The Russian authorities are preparing now to send back over one thousand people to a country where the lives of civilians are put at risk on a daily basis by both the Russian security forces and the Chechen fighters.

The financial compensation, promised by the Moscow-backed Chechen authorities to returning refugees cannot replace the obligations of the Russian government under international humanitarian law and human rights law. "Internally displaced people have the right to be protected against forcible return to or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and/or health would be at risk. Present day Chechnya is certainly such a place," the organization said.

"Amnesty International opposes the return of internally displaced persons under pressure and duress to unsafe environment. We warn that the closure of Aki Yurt camp in Ingushetia should not become a precedent for further such closures," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe Program Director.

The organization appeals to the international community to ensure that people who have fled the conflict are not returned to Chechnya or other parts of the Russian Federation unless and until their safe and durable return with dignity is assured.

Background

The renewal of hostilities in Chechnya in 1999 resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, many of them relatives or themselves victims of gross human rights violations. At least 110,000 Chechens remain in Ingushetia, and while many of them would be willing to return home under the right circumstances, they list security concerns as their main reason for not wanting to do so for the time being.

The recent hostage crisis in Moscow has further worsened the plight of Chechens in the Russian Federation. In the republic itself, the Russian security forces continue to commit serious human rights violations against the civilian population in a climate of impunity. In other parts of Russia, Chechens have been subjected to harassment and arbitrary detention by law enforcement agencies.

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