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Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights urge the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to address human rights in the Chechen Republic

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights are calling on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to address human rights issues in Chechnya during its Plenary Session in Strasbourg, January 27-31, 2003. In a joint statement, the three human rights organizations urge the Assembly to include in the upcoming resolution on Human rights in the Chechen Republic the following five specific areas of concern:

Pressure on internally displaced persons to return to Chechnya, and camp closures amounting to *de facto* forcible return of internally displaced persons. *Particularly disturbing is the Russian government's decision to close the Aki-Yurt camp in Ingushetia in late 2002, in the midst of winter, as most of the people evicted had no alternative housing.*

The targeting of civilians by both sides to the conflict, in violation of international humanitarian law; the intensified campaign of threats against and unlawful killing of pro-Moscow civil servants by Chechen rebel forces; and the continuing enforced disappearances and unlawful killings perpetrated by Russian troops. *In the December bomb attack on a government building in Grozny eighty-three people were killed; rebel forces are also believed to have unlawfully killed seven civil servants, and abducted another nine people, since mid-November 2002. Russian troops continue to perpetrate numerous unlawful killings and "disappearances".*

The unlawful killing by Russian forces of a former pro-Moscow Chechen official, apparently in retaliation for her public statements against abuses by Russian forces. *On November 29, 2002, Russian soldiers evidently killed Malika Umazheva, the former head of the local administration of Alkhan-Kala village who was expected to resume her post on December 1. Over the past two years, she had helped human rights groups document abuses in Alkhan-Kala.*

The continuing lack of a meaningful accountability process to bring to justice those responsible for abuses on both sides of the conflict. *Hundreds of investigations into allegations of abuse have led to very few prosecutions, and recent official figures show that only forty-six military servicemen have been convicted for abuses against civilians in Chechnya during the three-year-long conflict.*

The lack of access to Chechnya for international observers, and lack of transparency about available information on abuses, in particular the Russian government's continued failure to authorize the

publication of the reports by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture on its visits to the Russian Federation. *Russia closed the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya on December 31, 2002, after refusing to agree to a new mandate that included a human rights monitoring component. Russia has also failed to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Torture and Extrajudicial Executions.*

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights urge the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:

To ensure that its resolution makes clear that camp closures that amount to *de facto* forcible return of internally displaced persons are unacceptable;

To ensure that its resolution expresses concern about the continuing high civilian toll of the conflict, and calls on both sides to abide by international humanitarian law;

To ensure that its resolution calls on the Russian government to present the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Assembly with an account of the steps taken to date to investigate the case of the murder of Malika Umazheva;

To ensure that its resolution deplores the fact that the Russian government has failed to provide the detailed list of investigations into crimes committed by Russian soldiers during the Chechnya conflict due in April 2002, and to renew its request to be fulfilled by its next session in April 2003;

To call on the Russian government to agree to a new mandate for the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya that includes human rights monitoring, and to facilitate the long overdue visits by U.N. special representatives to Chechnya;

To include in its resolution a call on the Russian government to authorize the publication of all CPT reports on the Russian Federation without further delay.

Visit the Amnesty International Russia Campaign website: <http://www.amnesty.org/russia>

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