

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Russian Federation: A step in the right direction

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of the Russian government to authorize the publication today of one of the reports of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) concerning its visit to the Russian Federation.

"This is a first step in the right direction that may help curb torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of people deprived of their liberty in the Russian Federation," the human rights organization said.

"Amnesty International's research reveals that torture and ill-treatment of people in detention is widespread. In the Chechen Republic this practice is often accompanied by 'disappearances'. We are hoping that the publication of this report will lead to more accountability and indicates a willingness on the part of the Russian authorities to take measures to prevent torture and to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice," the organization added.

The CPT is the independent and impartial expert body established by the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, a treaty which the Russian Federation ratified in 1998. CPT delegations have so far made 11 visits to different regions of the country. Six of these visits, including the last one between 23 and 29 May 2003, have been to the Chechen Republic.

"Amnesty International calls on the authorities in the Russian Federation to send a clear message to the law enforcement agencies and security forces that they must respect human rights in all circumstances, and that those who do not will be made to answer for their actions in a court of law," the organization added.

From the start of its current year-long campaign aimed at improving respect and protection of human rights of all people in the Russian Federation Amnesty International has been calling on the Russian authorities to authorize the publication of all reports of the CPT's visits.

The organization strongly urges the Russian government to:
Make public the reports of *all* CPT's visits to the Russian Federation;
Take all necessary measures to implement the CPT's recommendations without delay;
Inform the public about measures it is taking to implement CPT's recommendations.

Background

The Russian Federation became a party to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 1998. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), established by the Convention, is comprised of independent and impartial experts, whose visits and recommendations aim to protect detainees from torture, cruel and inhuman treatment. The reports of CPT visits and recommendations are confidential: they can be published only with the consent of the government in question.

The Russian Federation was the last of the states parties to the European Convention Against Torture to authorize the publication of one of the CPT's reports .

It is only on exceptional occasions that the CPT releases public statements regarding its concerns in a particular country. The lack of response to its recommendations relating to the Chechen Republic from the Russian government prompted the CPT to take the exceptional step in July 2001 to publish a public statement. The statement expressed the CPT's concern about the impasse it had reached with the Russian Federation on two issues, namely the carrying out of a thorough and independent inquiry into events in a detention facility at Chernokozovo detention centre during the period December 1999 to early February 2000, following information strongly indicating that many detainees had been ill-treated; and action taken to uncover and prosecute cases of ill-treatment of detainees in the Chechen Republic during the current conflict.

Compelling information gathered by Amnesty International over recent years from victims and other sources attests to the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment by law-enforcement officials across the Russian Federation:

Zelimkhan Murdalov left his home in the Chechen capital Grozny on 2 January 2001, saying he would be back in an hour. That was the last time his family ever saw him. His father discovered that a young man matching his description had been detained in the centre of the city. Police told him that his son was detained on charges of possessing cannabis and was later released. However, detainees who had been held in the same cell as Zelimkhan Murdalov reportedly said that when they saw him a day after his arrest he was unconscious after being severely beaten, and his body was mutilated. A criminal case was opened in January 2001 into Zelimkhan Murdalov's 'disappearance', but his father still does not know the fate or whereabouts of his son and the perpetrators have not yet been brought to justice.

Eighteen-year old Tigran Airapetian was detained by a police officer in 2001 in northern Moscow. He was accused of demanding money from an acquaintance in a dispute over a mobile telephone. Tigran Airapetian was taken to a police station where he was reportedly severely beaten. After his release he filed a complaint and the Butyrskii procuracy opened a criminal investigation into the allegations. Despite Tigran Airapetian giving detailed descriptions and the names of the three men he identified as responsible, the Butyrskii procurator closed the preliminary investigations "until the persons accused of the offence are identified". In September 2001 Tigran Airapetian filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France, claiming that his rights under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights had been violated.

Amnesty International continues to receive reports about "disappearances" of persons in Chechnya. Press reports indicate that about two people per day continue to "disappear".

Public Document

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