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Chechnya: Civilians stranded in Grozny must be allowed to escape bombing

Russian and Chechen forces must do all in their power to allow civilians trapped by the bombing in Grozny, numbering up to 40,000, to exit safely, Amnesty International said today as members worldwide began urgent action on behalf of civilians in the capital.

Despite claims by the Russian authorities that they are ‘doing everything in their power to allow the citizens of Grozny to leave the city,’ people who have tried to leave the city through “safe corridors” have reportedly come under Russian attack. Other civilians apparently know nothing about the Russian declared “safe corridors” and have not seen any of the leaflets dropped by Russian aircraft warning them to flee.

A spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stated that there has been no significant movement out of Grozny but only a “trickle of people sneaking out”. The Russian authorities reported that by 11 January 6,443 civilians had left Grozny since the beginning of the military offensive, a small proportion of the city’s population.

The Russian authorities claimed on 10 January that there were 20,000 civilians left in Grozny, kept there by Chechen fighters as a human shield. The Chechen authorities claim that 40,000 civilians are trapped in Grozny, unable to leave due to constant Russian bombing and artillery attacks.

“People who remain in Grozny are running out of food and supplies. Both sides say they are concerned for civilians, but they should demonstrate this by doing all in their power to enable civilians who wish to leave, to leave safely,” Amnesty International said.

Members of Amnesty International around the world are writing to the Russian and Chechen authorities urging them to take steps to allow civilians who want to leave Grozny to leave without risk of attack.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>