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Chechnya: Four years after joining the club, Russia continues to flout the rules

While the Russian government's apparent willingness to join with the Council of Europe to investigate alleged atrocities committed by Russian troops is a welcome development, the first move toward any investigation must be to allow immediate independent and unimpeded access to all areas of Chechnya for international human rights monitors, Amnesty International said today four years after Russia joined the Council of Europe, promising respect for human rights.

The visit today to Chechnya by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and members of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture comes exactly four years after Russia joined the Council, promising a commitment to human rights and international humanitarian law.

Russia joined the Council of Europe in February 1996 in the midst of the last conflict in Chechnya and massive human rights violations against civilians. Today the Russian forces are reportedly responsible for the same human rights violations: reported torture and ill-treatment in "filtration camps", including rape of male and female detainees; rape of Chechen women in the areas under Russian control; summary and extrajudicial executions of civilians; direct attacks on hospitals and surrounding areas and on medical personnel; direct attacks on civilians fleeing the conflict and on civilian convoys; indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas; arbitrary detention and "disappearances".

"The Council of Europe should give a clear signal to the Russian government that its visit is not merely symbolic and that consistent disregard for human rights obligations will not be tolerated," Amnesty International said.

Specifically, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Alvaro Gil-Robles, should insist that the Russian government:

- grant immediate and unrestricted access to all areas of Chechnya to a team of international investigators to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of human rights abuses by both sides of the conflict,*
- ensure full access to detainees, especially in the “filtration camps”, by the International Committee of the Red Cross,*
- provide assurances that any person detained and taken to a “filtration camp” will not be subjected to torture and ill-treatment.*

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