

UA 135/01 Fear for safety / Fear of torture / Prisoner ofconscience

1 June 2001

RUSSIAN FEDERATION - CHECHEN REPUBLIC Dik ALTEMIROV, aged 67

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Dik Altemirov, a respected Chechen human rights activist and former government minister and vice president, has been detained and is believed to be held incommunicado at a secret detention facility, where he is at grave risk of torture and ill-treatment. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Russian federal forces detained Dik Altemirov, former Minister for Tourism and Sport in the Chechen government and former Vice President of the Chechen Republic with responsibility for social and humanitarian issues, in Grozny on 24 May. It is not known where he is being held. The official reason for his arrest is suspected involvement in the activities of Chechen armed groups. However, Amnesty International believes that Dik Altemirov is being held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, and his involvement in human rights activities on behalf of the victims during the armed conflict in Chechnya.

During the previous armed conflict in Chechnya in 1994-1996, Dik Altemirov was the chairman of the *Assembly of Public Political Parties and Organizations of the Chechen Republic*, a non-governmental organization campaigning for the preservation of the independent status of Chechnya through peaceful means, and for an end to the armed conflict. The Assembly has been involved in organizing peaceful protests and demonstrations on behalf of Chechen civilians for peace. Dik Altemirov has supported the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) assistance group in Grozny, and has provided information and support to members of the human rights group *Memorial* during the current conflict.

Dik Altemirov is known to oppose the tactics adopted by armed Chechen groups, and he has previously criticised the activities of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Chechnya.

Torture and ill-treatment of detainees is a well-documented practice in Chechnya, and civilians frequently "disappear" after being detained by Russian forces. Given these circumstances, Amnesty International fears for Dik Altemirov's safety and well-being at the hands of Russian federal forces and special police detachments while he is held on apparently fabricated charges implying that he is a Chechen fighter. The organization calls on the Russian authorities to immediately release him from detention and to provide information about his whereabouts.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The pattern of "disappearance", torture, and extrajudicial and summary execution of detainees, and the use of unofficial and secret detention sites has been exhaustively documented by Russian and international human rights organizations. The mutilated corpses of some of the "disappeared" and of many other unidentified individuals have been discovered in more than a dozen dumping grounds throughout Chechnya. Federal authorities in Russia are not committed to a meaningful accountability process. Criminal investigations into abuses by military and police forces in Chechnya have been shoddy, ineffective, and incomplete.

Russian forces on "cleansing operations" (in Russian, *zachistka*) in towns and villages continue to arbitrarily arrest and use disproportionate force against civilians. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, by the end of last summer 15,000 people in Chechnya had been detained in relation to the conflict. Most are reportedly beaten or subjected to torture while held in incommunicado detention, often in makeshift pits in the ground on locations where Russian military units are stationed, or near Russian military check-points. Bribes are almost always extorted from their relatives in exchange for their release.

Men, women and children have also been systematically tortured in detention in "filtration camps": they are raped, beaten with hammers and clubs, tortured with electric shocks and tear gas, their teeth are sawn off and some are simultaneously beaten around both ears in order to burst the ear-drums. Over a thousand have simply "disappeared" in custody. The dead bodies of some of the "disappeared" have sometimes been sold to their relatives; other bodies have been found in mass graves. Most recently, the bodies of four men were discovered in a makeshift dumping site near the Russian military base in the town of Khankala. The four men had been shot. They were identified by relatives as part of a group of 11 civilians, who had been detained in March by Russian forces in the town of Argun. The whereabouts of another seven people remain unknown.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian or your own language:**

- urging the Russian government to immediately make public the whereabouts and state of health of Dik Altemirov;
- asking the authorities to immediately release him from detention and for all charges against him to be dropped;
- urging the Russian government immediately to make public the names, whereabouts, current state of health and the charges brought against everyone detained in the various detention facilities and the so-called "filtration camps" in Chechnya.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir PUTIN  
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, g. Moskva, Kreml  
 Prezidentu Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Russian Federation  
**Telegrams: PUTINU V., Kreml, Moskva, Russia**  
**Faxes: + 7 095 206 6277**  
**Salutation: Dear President**

Director General of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation Nikolay PATRUSHEV,  
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 101000 g. Moskva  
 Bolshaya Lubyanka 1/3  
 Federalnaya Sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Russian Federation  
**Telegrams: Generalnomu direktoru FSB, PATRUSHEVU N., Moskva, Russia**  
**Faxes: + 7 095 975 2470**  
**Salutation: Dear Director General**

Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Vladimir USTINOV  
 Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 103793 g. Moskva K-31  
 Ul. B. Dimitrovka, d15a, Generalnaya Prokuratura Rossiyskoy Federatsii  
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**Salutation:** Dear Procurator General

**COPIES TO:**

Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Igor IVANOV

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Special Representative of the President on Human Rights and Freedoms in the Chechen Republic Vladimir KALAMANOV

Rossiskaya Federatsiya, 103132 g. Moskva, Staraya ploshad pod. 6,  
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KALAMANOVU, V., Russian Federation

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and to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 July 2001.