

AI Index No. EUR 46/025/2001
NWS 11/175/2001

Press Release from Amnesty International EU Office

Brussels, 2 October, 2001 www.amnesty-eu.org

Putin-EU Summit: Human rights must not be “traded” for coalition against terrorism

As EU leaders prepare to hold talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Brussels tomorrow, Amnesty International warns the EU against trading human rights in their efforts to shore up the global anti-terrorist coalition. Amnesty International calls on EU leaders to make a public commitment about their continuing concerns over Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya.

“There is a universal right to justice for innocent victims everywhere – whether they are buried under the rubble in New York, Grozny or Moscow,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International’s EU Office in Brussels, in an open letter to EU leaders. “The EU and Russia can only be credible partners in the struggle to ensure the security of their citizens and in defence of global justice if justice is done for all victims.”

Amnesty International is disturbed by the comments of the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder during a joint press conference with the Russian President in Berlin on 25 September, in which he said: “As regards Chechnya, there will be and must be a more differentiated evaluation in world opinion.” The German Chancellor’s remarks followed an announcement that Russia would help arm Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance opposition.

The EU stated on 12 September, following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington that: “Nothing can justify the utter disregard for

ethical values and human rights.” Amnesty International warns that this general statement of principles cannot be applied selectively.

“There is a tendency emerging to soft-pedal on human rights in order to foster the broadest possible coalition, Russia being one of the more obvious examples,” said Dick Oosting, of Amnesty International in Brussels. “Any sell-out at this stage may seriously undermine the credibility of the EU’s entire human rights policy.”

The human rights situation in Chechnya remains critical and Russian assurances to the EU and the UN have not been honoured. Both parties to the conflict continue to commit serious human rights abuses and breaches of international law, although Russian forces are responsible for the overwhelming majority of physical harm and material damage suffered by Chechen civilians.

In particular:

- Russian forces continued at least until August with “cleansing operations” in towns and villages, arbitrarily detaining civilians and using disproportionate force against them;
- Russian authorities have failed to investigate, or ensure justice for civilian victims of human rights abuses by Russian forces;
- Independent human rights observers still face significant obstacles in gaining access to Chechnya;
- Russia has still not complied with the demand of the UN Commission on Human Rights for accountability and full cooperation with the UN;
- Russia still provides very little assistance for the estimated 150,000 Chechen displaced people currently in Ingushetia.

To download Amnesty International’s open letter to EU leaders, go to www.amnesty-eu.org

For further comment/background and interviews:

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