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RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON ALL PARTIES IN
THE CHECHEN CONFLICT TO RESPECT THE RULES OF WAR

Following today's renewed attacks on Chechen civilians and a threat to execute Russian soldiers, Amnesty International urgently calls on both parties in the Chechen conflict to respect the rules of war.

"We fear civilians are dying because of indiscriminate Russian military action to root out Chechen resistance," Amnesty International said today.

"This random killing of civilians cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. There is no excuse, however, for Chechen fighters to execute Russian soldiers held captive."

At least 20 civilians were reportedly killed today when Russian warplanes and artillery attacked the village of Makhety in the southern part of the Chechen Republic.

Clashes yesterday in the village of Gekhi were the fiercest since a fragile cease-fire came into force last month. It was reported that the village had been completely sealed off by Russian troops and that aircraft and helicopter gun ships were circling overhead. A number of civilians were said to have been killed and wounded. Amnesty International fears that civilians in Gekhi and Makhety may be coming under indiscriminate fire from Russian forces in attacks similar to those launched against Shali, Sernovodsk and Samashki earlier this year.

In response to an earlier threat by Russia's military chief in the region to "take appropriate steps for destroying the bandits and terrorists" unless all prisoners of war were handed over, Chechen spokesman Movladi Udugov said that separatist fighters would execute all Russian soldiers held by them if the Russian troops carried out any provocative actions against civilians and renewed warfare.

It is not clear how many Russian soldiers are in rebel hands but Russian officials have said dozens are being held. Both sides are believed to hold more than 1,000 prisoners between them.

International humanitarian law prohibits direct or indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the summary execution of prisoners.

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