

EXTERNAL

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Fear for safety

14 August 1996

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION - CHECHEN REPUBLICCivilians trapped in Grozny**

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Hundreds and possibly thousands of people are reported to have been killed since 6 August 1996, when heavy fighting broke out in Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic. Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the safety of civilians trapped in the capital and the surrounding areas, and of those trying to flee.

Pro-independence Chechen forces have been holding large areas of Grozny for the past week despite Russian air and ground attacks. Thousands of civilians are reported to be trapped in areas of Grozny where fighting is continuing, and efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor for their safe evacuation have so far not come to fruition.

Reports state that refugees had to flee their homes whilst being fired on by bullets, mortar bombs, shells and rockets. Western journalists witnessed an attack by a Russian helicopter on a group of civilian cars five kilometres outside Grozny. At least four people including two children are reported to have been killed as a result. A column of refugees leaving Grozny was reported to have come under a rocket attack at 12.05pm on 14 August.

The fighting continues despite discussions of a cease-fire which are being held between President Yeltsin's envoy to Chechnya, Aleksandr Lebed, and Chechen Chief-of-Staff Aslan Maskhadov.

Amnesty International takes no position on territorial disputes. However, within the terms of its mandate the organization is calling on all parties to the conflict to protect victims of the fighting in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Such protection includes ensuring that all steps are taken to protect civilians in the area.

Fighting is also reported to be taking place in the settlements of Argun and Gudermes, but Amnesty International is not aware of reports of civilian casualties in those areas.

More than 30,000 people have died since Russian troops were sent into the Chechen republic to crush its independence bid in December 1994.

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

- urging all sides to protect civilians from deliberate or indiscriminate attack in Grozny by ensuring scrupulous respect for international humanitarian and human rights law.

*NOTE: Owing to communication difficulties, the International Secretariat will ensure that these concerns are forwarded to the Pro-independence Chechen authorities.*

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin  
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**Salutation: Dear President**

President Yeltsin's Special Envoy in Chechnya, Aleksandr Lebed

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**Telegrams: Defence Minister, Moscow, Russia**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

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

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 September 1996.