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## Chechnya: Amnesty International appeals to the OSCE

*“Many people died. Children among them. It was mostly women, children and old people, because these are the people mainly left in the town. The fighters never suffer; it’s always the peaceful civilians. So many people died and so many people were like me; I am just a drop in the ocean. But even without a leg and a hand, I survived. Many didn’t.”*

Leila Migieva’s account of the Grozny market bombing on 21 October 1999.

On the eve of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Summit in Turkey, Amnesty International is calling on OSCE participating states to seriously address the worsening human rights and humanitarian situation in Chechnya. The OSCE should use its influence to urge the Russian authorities to abide by human rights and humanitarian obligations, including to provide protection and safe passage to people fleeing from the conflict and allow unimpeded access to humanitarian relief.

An Amnesty International representative has just returned from the Chechnya/Ingushetia border with testimonies from people fleeing the conflict (see over). The testimonies strongly suggest that Russian military operations have included direct attacks on civilians and that thousands of people trying to flee Chechnya have been prevented from crossing national and international borders.

Direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, as well as indiscriminate attacks on residential areas in Chechen towns and villages continue to be reported daily. Civilians who have crossed the Ingushetia/Chechnya border in the past week have reported continuous shelling and air attacks in many areas, including Bamut, Grozny, Urus Martan and Achkhoy Martan.

Although the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya was officially re-opened on 1 November, access to Ingushetia remains arbitrary. The Russian authorities will not allow international media representatives and independent observers to cross into Chechnya, claiming it is unsafe.

Vehicles carrying people out of Chechnya are generally not allowed through the border unless the passengers are seriously wounded; people are forced to walk several kilometres through the border into Ingushetia, leaving their cars behind. Many people told Amnesty International they were forced to pay money at border crossings before being allowed to leave Chechnya.

There are currently around 190,000 internally displaced people in Ingushetia, many of them in camps with insufficient water, shelter, food and heating resulting in poor health and illness.

Amnesty International is urging the OSCE to support the demand for an international investigation of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law to establish the truth and to identify those responsible.

“The world cannot sit idly by while Russia continues direct attacks on civilians,” Amnesty International said. “The OSCE should use its collective power to urge Russia to end the onslaught.”

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**For more information please call Amnesty International’s Researcher on Russia, Mariana Katzarova in Finland on mobile +358 50 36 76 311 or Amnesty International’s press office in London +44 171 413 5566.**

**Testimonies from Amnesty International’s recent mission to the Ingushetia border follow.**

## **Testimonies from the Ingushetia/Chechnya border**

*The following testimonies were collected during the past week by an Amnesty International representative at the Ingushetia/Chechnya border.*

### **Targeting Civilians**

On 14 November Yakha Arsamikova's family, including 14 children, crossed the border to escape continuous bombing of their village, Alkhan Yurt in Urus Martan district. She recalled that on 12 November;

“It was impossible to leave the basement. Airplanes bombed at night in the village. There were rockets too. We can see the bombs and rockets falling. Old people and women are being killed, not fighters. Our neighbours, the Umarkhajiev family - Zara, Doku, and Raisa, peaceful civilians, were killed when a bomb hit their house in Lenin Street. Another neighbour, Sultan Abdulhajiev was killed in the same attack.”

Lecha Mogamedovich Visaitov told Amnesty International how, on November 3, four splinter shells fell on the centre of Achkoy Martan village during a funeral ceremony for his cousin when he was hit and wounded in the leg, foot, and right arm.

Tousari Esmurzayeva from Grozny told Amnesty International that she was travelling by road back to Grozny on 29 October when she saw people burning inside buses on the road leading to the border around the village of Shamiyurt. She witnessed eight corpses from the buses being buried.

Amnesty International interviewed several witnesses who confirmed that during artillery attacks on 27 October, which the Russian federal forces claim were aimed at destroying the houses of Shamil Basayev, Alla Dudayeva, and Movladi Udugov in Grozny, a number of residential buildings in the area, Hospital No. 4 and a bus station were hit, causing a number of civilian casualties. The attacks reportedly produced over 100 casualties.

On 29 October a Russian air attack on the village of Shami-Yurt, Ashkhoy Martan district, hit a humanitarian convoy which reportedly included vehicles clearly marked with the Red Cross emblem. At least 25 people, including two Red Cross staff, were killed and up to 70 people were wounded.

On the same day 32-year-old Ramzan Mezhidov, freelance cameraman for TV Tsentr, was also killed when the convoy of cars he was travelling in was fired on by a Russian aircraft.

Two men were injured when a cluster bomb exploded on 23 October in the village of Novy Sharoy, Achkhoy Martan district. Around 17 children aged between 10 and 13 were wounded and seven people died instantly. Thirty-two-year-old Ali Gunashev had both his legs amputated while the second man, 'Mohamed', suffered a fractured skull and brain damage, and also had his legs amputated.

Amnesty International was told of another attack which took place on the night of 18 October in the village of Gekhi, Urus Martan district, in which a ground to ground rocket destroyed 10 houses. Among the wounded was eight-year-old Aset Sharipova who lost part of her foot.

Aset Sharipova's mother witnessed the death of eight people who were wounded in a later attack around the hospital in Urus Martan. They were delivered to the hospital where her daughter was undergoing surgery.

'Ibragim', not his real name, aged 20 from Naurskiy district, told Amnesty International that on October 9 he was stopped by 15-20 Russian soldiers in a field outside his village where he was tending to his animals. They gagged him and tied his hands and legs together with his own belt. He claimed that one of the soldiers cut his throat with a knife and the soldiers then left. When Amnesty International interviewed him in hospital, he asked to remain anonymous for fear of repercussions. 'Ibragim' also reported that two young men from a neighbouring village had been detained by Russian troops and were only released in exchange for food.

### **Filtration Camps**

Amnesty International was told by many sources of the existence of detention centres known as 'filtration camps'. The organization documented a large number of cases of torture and ill-treatment in filtration camps during the 1994-1996 conflict.

Several sources told Amnesty International that Russian forces are filtering both men and women at the border crossing checkpoint Kavkaz-1. Sixteen men were seen at a detention facility there at the beginning of November. Seven women, including one pregnant woman, who are accused of being relatives of fighters, were also seen detained.

A source claimed that on 10 November he saw several men who were bruised and with visible contusions on their faces in a detention facility situated in a house controlled by officers of the Federal Security Services.

Another source claimed that in the city of Mozdok, while he was at the Internal Troops' military base, he saw the arrival of a group of about 22 or 23 young men in handcuffs.

Amnesty International was also told that during filtration at the Kavkaz-1 border crossing, men with blisters on their hands were detained on suspicion of having been involved in digging trenches for Chechen fighters and that a list with the names of men who fought on the Chechen side during the last conflict is being used to detain men in the current conflict.

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