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Civic Assistance



EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY CENTRE
EHRAC

fidh
Fédération internationale
des ligues des droits de l'Homme



**Russian Chechen
Friendship Society**



**society for
threatened
peoples**

Swedish Helsinki Committee
for Human Rights

Council of Europe: Joint Open Letter to the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The undersigned organizations are deeply dismayed that the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe postponed its decision on the renewed request of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to be seized to report on "Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North Caucasus".

We are very concerned that by failing again to take up the opportunity to immediately resume separate monitoring and public reporting on the human rights situation in the North Caucasus, the Bureau of the Assembly has shown a lack of commitment to addressing the ongoing human rights abuses and the impunity for the grave human rights abuses which have taken place in the region.

While in January 2006, the Assembly's resolution and recommendation indicated that the very serious human rights situation required attention, instead, it appears that the approach of the Bureau of the Assembly since June 2006 has been to scale down the scrutiny afforded to the region.

We consider that this approach is inconsistent with the very findings of the Assembly that the situation in the region was one of the most serious in Europe and demanded the attention of the bodies of the Council of Europe, whose core task is the protection of human rights.

Since the Assembly last reported on the region in January 2006, serious human rights violations have continued, chiefly in the context of counterterrorism operations. People have been subjected to enforced disappearance, torture and arbitrary detention, including in secret detention facilities. Unlawful killings have also continued. Armed groups also continued to target civilians and carry out abductions.

Individuals in the region who seek to promote respect for human rights and those who dare to speak out to expose human rights abuses continue to face harassment and intimidation. The most glaring example was the abduction on the night of 23 to 24 November 2007 of Oleg Orlov, head of the Russian NGO Human Rights Centre Memorial, and three journalists from the Russian TV station REN TV, Artem Vysotskii, Karen Sakhinov and Stanislav Goriachikh. Oleg Orlov and his REN TV colleagues were in Nazran to cover a demonstration against human rights violations by law enforcement agencies that was due to take place in Nazran the following day. Armed masked men in camouflage seized the four men, beat and threatened to kill them, then abandoned them two hours later. The Russian news agency *Interfax* quoted sources within the police stating that the abduction had been carried out by "the military". Criminal investigations into the incident have been opened under several different articles of the Russian Criminal Code but not under provisions criminalizing "abduction" (Article 126) or "threat to kill or cause serious damage to health" (Article 119).

Moreover, the few positive developments in bringing people to justice for the grave human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law regrettably remain exceptions to the impunity enjoyed by the vast majority of those responsible. In particular, prosecutions have not yet been brought against those

suspected of responsibility for the human rights violations which have been examined in cases ruled upon by the European Court of Human Rights concerning the conflict in the North Caucasus.

We call on the Bureau of the Assembly to ensure without further delay, the resumption of the Assembly's dedicated monitoring and public reporting on the human rights situation in the North Caucasus.

Amnesty International (AI), London
Chechen Committee for National Salvation, Nazran
Civic Assistance Committee, Moscow
"Demos" Center, Moscow
European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC), London
Human Rights Center "Memorial", Moscow, Nazran and Grozny
Human Rights Watch (HRW), New York
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Paris
Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Oslo
Russian Chechen Friendship Society, Helsinki
Russian Justice Initiative, Utrecht
Society for Threatened Peoples, Bern
Swedish Helsinki Committee, Stockholm