

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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

We call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to ensure that it resumes, without delay, its separate monitoring and public reporting on the human rights situation in Chechnya and neighbouring republics of the Russian Federation.

We are deeply concerned that the decision taken last week by the Bureau of PACE -- to refer the issue of legal remedies for human rights violations in the North-Caucasus Region, to its Monitoring Committee, "to be taken into account in the preparation of the ongoing monitoring report with respect to the Russian Federation" -- would result in the scaling down of the monitoring and frequency of reporting on the human rights situation in this troubled region. This is so, as the Monitoring Committee, which has limited resources, is already charged with the monitoring a range of human rights issues and political reforms throughout the vast region of the Russian Federation and other Council of Europe member states. We consider that it is unrealistic to expect that this Committee could devote the intensive resources and time required to fully carry out the monitoring and reporting on the human rights crisis in the North Caucasus region, which is arguably the most acute in Europe, and requires more than a general response which would form merely a small part of the ordinary monitoring and reporting.

In view of the ongoing grave human rights situation in the region, merging such work with wider monitoring tasks rather than continuing dedicated monitoring is ill-advised and premature. The actions of federal and local law enforcement authorities continue to result in widespread and serious violations of the human rights of individuals, the large majority of whom are civilians. Among other things, individuals are being unlawfully killed, illegally detained, subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, and "disappeared". Indeed, the report which the PACE adopted last week on secret detentions and unlawful interstate transfers (renditions) of individuals involving Council of Europe member states, explicitly referred to unofficial and secret detention centres in the Chechen Republic. Rebel fighters also continue to be responsible for serious human rights abuses, including the targeting of civilians.

As PACE reports, including the report adopted in January 2006, have repeatedly documented, the perpetrators of these violations of the European Convention on Human Rights commit them with impunity, as there is little or no accountability in the Russian Federation for these crimes. Furthermore, a considerable number of individuals who have sought a remedy for such human rights violations by applying to the European Court of Human Rights, when no remedy was available in the Russian Federation, have been subjected to reprisals ranging from harassment and threats to death and "disappearance".

The Council of Europe has been one of the few intergovernmental bodies that has consistently engaged with the Russia Federation over the human rights situation in Chechnya, both through constructive engagement and critical reporting. The monitoring and reporting of the human rights situation in the region

by the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights has been a crucial component of the organization's response. Among other things, it has provided other bodies of the Council of Europe, as well as the public, with reliable and frank analyses of the human rights situation in Chechnya.

We consider that any decision which has the effect of scaling down of the monitoring and public reporting of the human rights situation in the North Caucasus would be inconsistent with the role that should be played by the Assembly in these circumstances.

To the thousands of victims of torture, enforced disappearance, secret detention and unlawful killing and abductions in Chechnya, it sends the terrible signal that their plight no longer warrants special attention.

Yours faithfully,

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  
International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Vienna  
Moscow Helsinki Group, Moscow  
Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), Oslo  
Russian Chechen Friendship Society, Nizhny Novgorod and Grozny  
Russian Justice Initiative, Utrecht  
Society for Threatened Peoples, Bern and Goettingen  
Swedish Helsinki Committee, Stockholm