

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

## News Flash

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### **Russian Federation: Civilians targeted and killed in recent spate of violent attacks**

Amnesty International strongly and unreservedly condemns the hostage-taking of children in southern Russia, the latest of a series of incidents in which civilians have been targeted.

Media reports say that up to 150 pupils, parents and teachers are being held hostage today by gunmen in the city of Beslan in North Ossetia. The gunmen are reported to have threatened to blow up the school if it is stormed by police and troops. They are said to be demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya.

In separate incidents, at least nine people were killed and many were wounded in a suspected suicide bomb attack near a Moscow underground station on 31 August 2004 and on 24 August 2004 89 people were killed in the explosions of two civilian airplanes. A group, calling itself the Istambouli Brigades, claimed responsibility for both incidents. It threatened to continue operations "until the killings of our Muslim brothers in Chechnya ceases".

Amnesty International strongly condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians and in the incident in North Ossetia, the targeting of children, who were going to school on the first day after summer holidays. Their lives have been put at risk and their human rights blatantly ignored.

"Hostage-taking is unacceptable in any circumstances and can never be justified. Those who commit such a crime are in clear breach of international humanitarian law, in particular Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, and should be brought to justice," Amnesty International said today.

"We are calling on those responsible to release the hostages immediately, unconditionally and unharmed."

"The Russian government has the duty to protect its citizens and to bring perpetrators of such violent acts to justice. We are calling on the authorities to ensure that any use of force and firearms is fully consistent with international standards and will not put in jeopardy the lives of the hostages," Amnesty International said.

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