

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 46/14/96

12 March 1996

Further information on EXTRA 34/96 (EUR 46/13/96, 7 March 1996) - Fear for safety and new concerns: Possible extrajudicial executions / Fear of torture

CHECHEN REPUBLIC - RUSSIAN FEDERATION Civilians in Sernovodsk

Amnesty International's grave concerns over continuing reports of civilian casualties during the attack and blockade on Sernovodsk by Russian federal forces have been heightened by reports of extrajudicial executions of civilians by Russian troops inside the town. The organization also fears for the safety of a number of detainees arrested since the beginning of the attack and removed to "filtration camps" where they may be subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

It has been estimated that 7,000 civilians remain in Sernovodsk. According to five Russian deputies of the state Duma and members of "Memorial", a Russian non-governmental human rights group, who have been trying to reach Russian military commanders to get agreement for civilians to be allowed to leave the town, the actions of the federal forces have resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties. Witnesses claim that the corpses of those killed are still on the streets of Sernovodsk as relatives are either not permitted or not able to bury them under the heavy sniper fire in town. The Ingush Ministry for Emergency situations reported that, according to their information, around 200 injured people are trapped in the town. The hospital and the pharmacy in Sernovodsk have been reportedly destroyed as a result of the Russian military attack.

The Russian federal forces have announced that men between the ages of 16 and 55 may not leave the town under any circumstances and all of them will be subjected to "filtration". Members of "Memorial" reported that they collected witness accounts suggesting that a number of civilians have been arrested since the beginning of the attack, including Salman Evloev, 15, who was transferred to a "filtration camp", reportedly near Assinovskaya station. It was reported that the detainees were possibly transferred to the "filtration camps" by Russian army helicopters. Amnesty International fears for the safety of those detained in these camps, in view of reports of widespread beatings and torture of detainees held in such camps throughout the war in Chechnya.

In addition to concerns that civilian casualties might be a result of what reports describe as an indiscriminate attack on the town, Amnesty International is also seriously concerned about reports of extrajudicial executions by Russian troops who have entered the town. According to the head of Sernovodsk administration, Boris Kaniev, a number of incidents of deliberate killings of civilians by Russian soldiers have taken place. He witnessed the arrest of a young woman on the street by several soldiers who took her to a nearby house, where later her dead body was found.

Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have not been permitted access to Sernovodsk since the attack began on 3 March, neither have journalists, human rights monitors, humanitarian aid workers or any other "foreigners". It was reported that on 6 March the head of the ICRC delegation stated that: "the Russian military leaders clearly want to prevent any humanitarian action in Sernovodsk. Not even an explanation was given." On 10 March the prefect for Sundjensk region, Askhad Islamov, reported after a meeting he had in Sernovodsk with the federal forces that the Russian military

command in the town has "advised" the representatives of the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations to remove their vehicles from around Sernovodsk. If they failed to do so the vehicles might be fired at.

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

- calling for all steps to be taken to ensure the safety of civilians in Sernovodsk, and to uphold basic principles of international humanitarian law in particular as regards to the protection of the civilian population;
- expressing serious concern at reports of extrajudicial executions of civilians in Sernovodsk by Russian troops;
- demanding assurances that any men detained and taken to "filtration camps" will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that immediate access into Sernovodsk be granted to members of the ICRC in order to ensure safe passage of all civilians, especially the wounded, out of the town;

if possible, please also:

- call on the Russian Government to comply with its commitments on respect for human rights, given to the Council of Europe upon Russia's acceptance to the Council in February 1996, including the commitment to "respect strictly the provisions of international humanitarian law, including in cases of armed conflicts on its territory";
- urge the Russian Government to comply with its commitments to protect human rights in times of armed conflicts, given to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), when Russia signed the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security in December 1994.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin
 Russiyskaya Federatsiya
 g. Moskva
 Kreml
 Presidentu Rossiyskoy Federatsii
 Yeltsinu B.N.

Faxes: +7095 206 5173

Telegrams: Rossiya, Moskva, Kreml, Prezidentu Yeltsinu

Salutation: Dear President

President's Special Envoy in Chechnya, Oleg Lobov

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COPIES TO:

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Russian Federation Minister of Defence, General Pavel Grachev

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 April 1996.