

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Chechen Republic

Amnesty International's recommendations to the 56th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights

Massive human rights violations have taken place in the context of the renewed armed conflict in the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic. Amnesty International is concerned that the way in which the Russian forces are waging war in Chechnya — that is, in apparent disregard of international humanitarian law -- and the discriminatory manner in which Chechens have been targeted by the authorities in Moscow, suggest that the government has been involved in a campaign to punish an entire ethnic group. “Fighting crime and terrorism” is no justification for violating human rights.

Reports of violations of human rights and humanitarian law by the Russian forces have included torture and ill-treatment in “filtration camps”, including rape of male and female detainees; rape of Chechen women in the areas under Russian control; summary and extrajudicial executions of civilians; direct attacks on hospitals and on medical personnel; direct attacks on civilians fleeing the conflict and on civilian convoys; indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas; arbitrary detention and “disappearances”. Chechen fighters have reportedly also been responsible for human rights abuses such as using civilians as “human shields”, torture and ill-treatment, the killing of captured combatants and rape.

After entering Grozny at the beginning of February 2000, the Russian forces effectively sealed off the city from the outside world. They justified the closure of Grozny by saying that most of the districts were mined and dangerous to civilians. Although very few people were able to leave the city for neighbouring Ingushetia, reports did come out about abuses by Russian soldiers, in particular about extrajudicial and summary executions of civilians in different districts of Grozny, including of women and elderly people. There have also been reports of rape and other torture and ill-treatment. According to various estimates in February 2000 there were between 10,000 and 20,000 civilians still trapped in the city. Throughout the armed conflict no independent human rights monitors were allowed to enter Chechnya by the Russian authorities. However, at the end of February, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights was allowed to enter the republic.

From the very beginning of the conflict in September 1999 Russia has shown disregard for the rules governing armed conflict and the protection of the civilian population (see *Russian Federation - Chechnya: For the Motherland*, AI Index: EUR 46/46/99). Testimonies collected by representatives of Amnesty International and other international and Russian NGOs on the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya strongly suggest that the Russian federal forces failed to take sufficient precautions to ensure the safety of the civilian population and deliberately targeted civilians in Chechnya, many of them women and children. Amnesty International is concerned that the many thousands of people who were forced to flee as a result of the conflict do not have adequate access to protection and humanitarian assistance; and that people fleeing the conflict have been prevented from crossing national borders.

The Commission on Human Rights will meet from 20 March to 28 April 2000 in Geneva. Amnesty International will be drawing the Commission's attention to the situation in the Chechen Republic and calls on the Commission to:

1. Adopt a resolution expressing grave concern about the abuses of human rights and humanitarian law committed in the Chechen Republic and calling on all parties, in particular the Russian government, to take immediate steps to halt them;
2. Consider that only an international investigation can do justice to the allegations of grave abuses of human rights and humanitarian law committed in the Chechen Republic, given the high risk that any investigations conducted by Russian authorities will not meet international standards of fairness and impartiality. In that context Amnesty International recalls that it had already urged the Security Council in November 1999 to establish an international investigation into such abuses, in order to establish the truth and identify those responsible;
3. Urge the government of the Russian Federation to invite the Special Rapporteur on torture, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict to visit the Chechen Republic and neighbouring republics without delay and present their reports to the Commission and the General Assembly as soon as possible;

4. Urge the government of the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including by inviting her, or a special representative she might appoint, to visit the area while the Commission is in session and to report back and formulate recommendations to the Commission during its forthcoming session;
5. Request the High Commissioner for Human Rights to keep the Commission informed, during its forthcoming session, of the situation of human rights and humanitarian law in the Chechen Republic, and to request all UN bodies and programmes to assist the High Commissioner in this task;
6. Support the calls made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe for international human rights monitoring, and urge the government of the Russian Federation to permit the speedy deployment of human rights officers of the UN or regional organizations to monitor the situation in the Chechen Republic;
7. Urge the government of the Russian Federation to permit international humanitarian and human rights organizations access to all internally displaced and war-affected populations in the Chechen Republic and neighbouring republics; free access in the Chechen Republic and access for international and regional organizations to all places of detention, including the "filtration camps";
8. Urge the government of the Russian Federation to take effective steps to halt and prevent torture and ill-treatment of persons held in connection with the conflict, notably in 'filtration camps';
9. Request the Secretary-General to report on the human rights situation in the Republic of Chechnya to the Commission on Human Rights at its 57th session, including on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission's special mechanisms that have visited the area since the beginning of 2000.

<p>KEYWORDS: UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS / INDISCRIMINATE KILLING / ARMED CONFLICT /</p>
