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Russian Federation: Theatre hostage-taking "yet another example of disrespect for human rights" -- new report exposes extent of human rights abuse in Russia

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Moscow - With the publication of a new report on human rights violations in Russia, Amnesty International denounced the hostage-taking at a theatre in Moscow's Melnikov Street as "another example of how ordinary people's human rights are flagrantly disrespected" in the Russian Federation.

As the nation mourns the tragedy, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan added her voice: "I mourn the victims and extend my condolences and sympathy to the grieving families, to those who were injured by the ordeal, physically and mentally."

She cautioned that the conflict in Chechnya had already claimed a high human toll. She urged the authorities to safeguard the human rights of all civilians -- both Russians and Chechens.

The human rights organisation's 102-page report, '*The Russian Federation: denial of justice*', launched today (Tuesday 29 October) in Moscow, exposes the broad extent of human rights violations in Russia. It shows how victims are blocked from justice and remain vulnerable to renewed abuse. Perpetrators, meanwhile, regularly evade responsibility and are essentially free to commit further violations

Beginning the organisation's first-ever campaign on the country, Amnesty International is calling for urgent action to combat "a fateful cycle of human rights abuse" in Russia.

"The awful hostage-taking in the Moscow theatre is a terrifying reminder of the unsolved situation in Chechnya. We have condemned this criminal act as a despicable abuse of human rights," Irene Khan said.

"This mass hostage-taking is yet another outrageous human rights abuse arising from a conflict, which has led to huge human suffering of all those involved, in a country where abuses are common and redress for them a rarity."

"When people around the world think about human rights abuses in Russia, they think about Chechnya. But what is much less known is that the same climate of impunity which has marked the Chechen situation unfortunately permeates the entire criminal justice system of Russia."

Amnesty International's '*Denial of justice*' report exposes human rights violations across the country. These include torture in police stations; cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions in crowded disease-ridden prisons; racist violence against ethnic and religious minorities and foreigners; and abduction, "disappearance" and torture, including rape, in Chechnya.

"A pernicious cycle of human rights abuse exists in Russia today. If President Putin wants to promote Russia's role as a global player he must begin by delivering real justice and rights for everyone in Russia," stated Ms Khan.

"At this crucial moment in Russian history, President Putin must show international political leadership and not commit the same mistakes of the west by curtailing human rights in the name of combatting 'international terrorism'."

"President Putin must not use the 'war against terrorism' to avoid confronting the denial of justice which permeates all of Russian society," she concluded.

Amnesty International sets out dozens of recommendations for immediate reform and is calling on both the Russian authorities and the international community to act on these. They include the adoption of a law specifically criminalizing domestic violence, the establishment of an independent body to investigate acts of torture and the removal of all elements of the passport and registration system which serves as a basis for systematic discrimination.

The report lists cases such as that of:

Marina T. was stopped by traffic police in Yaroslavl' on 5 March 1999 and, apparently suspecting that she was drunk, they took her to a sobering-up facility. Once there three officers and a medical practitioner reportedly forcibly stripped her naked, hit her head against the wall and punched her in the face. She said that she was dragged by the hair into an adjoining room where she was raped by four men. During the court hearing the next morning, Marina T. says that she attempted to describe her torture to the judge, but that he interrupted her and accused her of being abusive towards the police officers before they detained her. Marina T. lodged a complaint with the procuracy, and two years later at the final hearing, the court found one officer guilty of premeditated infliction of bodily harm -- but released him immediately under an amnesty. Two other officers were given suspended sentences and stripped of the right to work as police officers for two years. Marina T.'s lawyers have challenged the verdicts and the process is continuing.

Alaudin Sadykov, a 51-year-old schoolteacher from Grozny, who was detained by Russian security officials on 5 March 2000 and taken to a police station in Grozny's Oktiabrskii district. He was reportedly beaten, forced to eat his own hair, and burned with red-hot pieces of metal; burn scars on his hands are still visible. He told Amnesty International: "They beat me and said, 'Let's cut off his head'. They took a large knife for slaughtering animals and cut off my left ear completely. Then they said, 'We'll cut your head off later.'" An investigation into his treatment was later suspended on the grounds that the perpetrators could not be identified.

Three Tajik construction workers reportedly tortured by police officers from Moscow's organized crime squad in July 2000 and held for three weeks without access to a lawyer. Their alleged mistreatment included being kicked, beaten about the head with a plastic bottle filled with water and burning with cigarettes. After two months in detention the men were released and the case against them was closed. After extensive delays, as of June 2002 an investigation against three officers was still pending.

To obtain more information, arrange an interview or briefing with Ms Khan, or obtain a copy of the B-roll, please contact our media officers in Moscow:

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