

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Arbitrary arrest /  
Incommunicado detention

22 February 2000

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION: CHECHEN REPUBLIC**

**Omar Khambiev, Chechen Minister of Health, surgeon  
His medical team: Sharip Khambiev, Shaih Zairkhanov, Malika Edisultanova (f),  
Shirvani Gadaev, Abubakar Ismailov, Zarema Khasimova (f), Aminat Amalaeva  
(f), Samrudiy Zhabrailov and up to 15 others**

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Russian Federal forces detained the Chechen Minister of Health, surgeon Omar Khambiev, and his medical team of up to 24 doctors and nurses, on 2 or 3 February. Amnesty International believes they are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

They are reported to be detained incommunicado in the Mozdok "filtration camp", in a Russian military base in the Republic of North Ossetia, bordering on Chechnya. Their exact whereabouts and state of health are unknown.

Omar Khambiev was allegedly targeted by the Russian forces because his brother, Magomed Khambiev, is a well-known Chechen military commander.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Women and men crossing between Chechnya and Ingushetia are subjected to "filtration" at the Russian military checkpoint: their identity documents are checked against computer records, which apparently include details of suspected members of armed Chechen groups and their relatives. They are usually kept for some time at a detention place at the checkpoint and then taken to one of at least four "filtration camps", reportedly at Mozdok, Chernokozovo, a village in the Chechen territory under the control of Russian forces, and in the Chechen capital, Grozny. Hundreds of men and teenage boys have reportedly been taken to such camps from the towns and villages of Naursky District, Grozny and other regions under the control of the Russian forces. (See News Service 216/99, EUR 46/39/99, 17 November 1999, and the report 'For the Motherland' EUR 46/46/99).

Amnesty International is concerned that people arbitrarily detained in such camps, without access to their relatives, lawyers, or the outside world, are especially vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment. Testimonies of former detainees from the camp in Chernokozovo have recently come to light, in which the victims alleged that they were tortured and ill-treated in the camp. Amnesty International documented a large number of cases of torture and ill-treatment, including torture with electric shocks, in "filtration camps" during the 1994-1996 armed conflict in the Chechen Republic. Men between the ages of 16 and 55 were held in such camps throughout the conflict.

Until recently the Russian government had consistently denied the existence of secret "filtration camps". In an interview for Radio Liberty on 16 February the Head of the Main Department for Execution of Punishments in the Russian Ministry of Justice, Vladimir Yelunin, admitted the existence of "filtration camps" but denied all allegations of torture and ill-treatment in the camps. The only problem he acknowledged was that "it's dark and damp there". Meanwhile the representative of the Main Department of the Procurator General's Office in the North Caucasus, Sergey Prokopov, told ITAR-TASS news agency that after the seizure of Grozny "the holdovers have been replenished with a large amount

of prisoners." Nobody knows the exact number of detainees in the camps, but there are reportedly at least 700 in the Chernokozovo camp alone.

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

- urging the Russian government to immediately make public the whereabouts and state of health of Omar Khambiev and his medical team, including those named above, and to explain the legal basis for their arrest and detention;
- urging the authorities to grant them immediate access to their families, lawyers of their own choice and medical care;
- asking the authorities to release them, unless they are officially charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- asking the authorities to initiate an investigation into their incommunicado detention and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the Russian government immediately to make public the names, whereabouts, current state of health and the charges brought against everyone detained in the four or more "filtration camps".

**APPEALS TO: (please note that, as fax machines can be switched off, it is better to fax during office hours: local time is GMT +3)**

Acting President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir PUTIN

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, g. Moskva, Kreml

I.o. Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Russian Federation

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**Salutation:Dear Acting President**

Director General of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

Nikolay PATRUSHEV, Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 101000 g. Moskva

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**Salutation: Dear Director General**

Acting Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Vladimir USTINOV

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya, 103793 g. Moskva K-31

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**Salutation: Dear Acting Procurator General**

**COPIES TO:**

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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 4 April 2000.