

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 46/15/00

2 March 2000

Further information on EXTRA 06/00 (EUR 46/04/00, 1 February 2000) and follow-up (EUR 46/05/00 4 February 2000) - Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Arbitrary arrest / Incommunicado detention

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: CHECHEN REPUBLIC Andrey BABITSKY, 35, journalist

Radio Liberty journalist Andrey Babitsky has been released and is now in Moscow. He is not allowed to leave the city limits, pending further investigation into criminal charges filed against him of possessing a forged passport, which carry a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment.

After weeks of speculation on his handover, his whereabouts and whether he was even alive, Andrey Babitsky resurfaced late on 25 February in detention in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan in the Russian Federation. He was released after the intervention of Acting President Vladimir Putin and was put on a special flight to Moscow on the evening of 28 February. Acting President Putin had reportedly said he doubted Babitsky was dangerous enough to warrant being held in custody.

In a telephone conversation with Amnesty International on 29 February, Andrey Babitsky said that he had been exchanged by the Russian authorities against his will and had been held in a house in southern Chechnya by unidentified Chechens. On 3 February, Russian Presidential Administration press service chief Sergey Yastrzhembsky had told a press briefing that Andrey Babitsky had been handed over to Chechen fighters in exchange for Russian soldiers. Yastrzhembsky apparently quoted from a letter agreeing to the exchange, allegedly signed by Andrey Babitsky.

Andrey Babitsky told Amnesty International: "I was not beaten by the Chechens who held me but they treated me really badly. It was psychological ill-treatment. Every day I was expecting the worst to happen to me. I don't exactly know who held me but I have my interpretation and my suspicions." Andrey Babitsky also said that the Chechens forced him to record the videotaped message shown on Russian television on 8 February which stated that he was "OK" but that he wanted to return home. At a press conference in Moscow on 1 March Andrey Babitsky revealed that he believes the group that held him after the exchange were pro-Moscow Chechens.

On his detention in Chernokozovo "filtration camp" prior to the 3 February exchange, Andrey Babitsky said: "I was beaten up with truncheons by Russian guards in Chernokozovo on the second day of my detention. This is a routine procedure in the camp. They beat any newcoming detainee by a few dozen blows of a truncheon on the body. I was kept in a cell with 15 other detainees. One of them was really badly beaten while I was there. I heard the screams of victims all the time. I heard monstrous torture being carried out there."

Andrey Babitsky also revealed that he heard a woman detainee screaming all night long while being tortured and possibly raped by the guards.

In an interview for the Russian television channel NTV on 29 February, Andrey Babitsky said that his Chechen captors forced him to agree to flee to Azerbaijan. He said they had taken his passport and identification papers and forged an Azeri passport, but forgot that they needed a border stamp.

Andrey Babitsky was driven to Dagestan and was forced by the two Chechens accompanying him to check in to a hotel with the false passport. He was arrested during what the Dagestani authorities claimed was a routine check of identity documents of everybody in the hotel.

On 1 March Andrey Babitsky checked into a Moscow hospital for a check-up, as his health has deteriorated.

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

- urging the Russian government to reveal the facts surrounding the arrest of Andrey Babitsky - his incommunicado detention, ill-treatment and forcible transfer to Chechens apparently working in close cooperation with the Russian forces;
- urging the Russian authorities to initiate a full and independent investigation into the human rights violations against Andrey Babitsky, and to hold those found responsible to account;
- urging the Russian authorities to investigate the human rights violations that Andrey Babitsky alleges have been taking place in the "filtration camps", such as torture and ill-treatment of male and female detainees, including rape.

APPEALS TO:

fax machines are often switched off outside office hours (+3 GMT)

Acting President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir PUTIN

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Salutation: Dear Acting President

Director General of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

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Salutation: Dear Director General

Acting Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Vladimir USTINOV

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Salutation: Dear Acting Procurator General

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 March 2000.