

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

News Flash

AI Index: EUR 46/065/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 223
3 December 2002

Russian Federation: Denmark releases Chechen envoy

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of Denmark's Justice Ministry to release Chechen envoy Akhmed Zakayev for lack of evidence. "Given the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment in the Russian penitentiary system, there were good reasons to fear for Akhmed Zakayev's physical safety were he to have been sent back to Russia. Moreover, in view of the massive publicity around this case and the inadequacies of the Russian justice system, there was very little chance that Akhmed Zakayev would have been given a fair trial in the Russian Federation," the organization said.

Akhmed Zakayev was detained in Denmark on 30 October 2002 following an extradition request from the Russian authorities for alleged crimes he committed in the period between the two armed conflicts in the Chechen Republic (1996-1999). The Danish Justice Ministry said it had not received sufficient evidence from the Russian authorities which would justify the extradition of Akhmed Zakayev.

Amnesty International had called on the Danish authorities to ensure that Akhmed Zakayev was not extradited without firm guarantees that his rights would be respected. The continuing conflict puts the rights of all Chechens under threat. Russian non-governmental organizations have pointed to the fate of two high-ranking officials from the previous Chechen administration, who were detained by the Russian authorities - one of them died in prison, the other disappeared after detention.

Background

Akhmed Zakayev, an envoy of the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, was arrested in Copenhagen where he was attending the World Chechen Congress. The Congress, planned well in advance, took place in the wake of the hostage-taking incident in a Moscow theatre, which left some 150 people dead.

Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened last month to boycott an EU-Russia summit in Copenhagen in protest against Denmark's decision to allow the Chechen conference to take place, and the venue was moved to Brussels.

For further information contact the Russia Campaign Press Officer Lydia Aroyo on +44 20 7413 5599 or +44 7798 555 629, e-mail: laroyo@amnesty.org; or the Russia Campaign Researcher Kim Wiesener on +44 20 7413 5618.

Visit the Amnesty International Russia Campaign website: www.amnesty.org/russia

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413

5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>