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Russian Federation: Accountability is key to normalization in North Caucasus

Only full accountability for the human rights violations that have been taking place over the past decade and more can bring real normalization to Chechnya and the North Caucasus, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

The report, [*Rule without law: Human rights violations in the North Caucasus*](#), highlights the continuing human rights violations in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria in a climate of impunity. It is based on testimonies that tell of indiscriminate killings, excessive use of force, as well as death and torture in custody, arbitrary and secret detention, abductions, threats to human rights activists and independent journalists, the targeting of relatives of suspected fighters, and the forced evictions of internally displaced people.

In the context of Chechnya, the counter-terrorism operation that the Russian authorities declared there gave a green light to these abuses. On 16 April 2009, the authorities announced its end only to reintroduce it in several districts shortly afterwards.

“There has been and continues to be a total failure of political will to uphold the rule of law and address impunity in Chechnya which has led to destabilization across the North Caucasus. Perpetrators of human rights violations – both past and present – too often walk free,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia programme Director.

While there is currently less fighting between government forces and armed groups in Chechnya, fighting in other regions has intensified.

“The recent attacks by armed groups against high ranking officials in Ingushetia, where on 22 June President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was wounded in an assassination attempt, are just the tip of the iceberg,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Hundreds of law enforcement officials and large numbers of civilians have been killed by armed groups throughout the region over recent years. Also in June, the deputy head of the Supreme Court of Ingushetia and the Interior Minister of Dagestan were assassinated.

At the same time, Amnesty International has received reports from Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria where people have been convicted of terrorism-related offences based on forced confessions and testimony extracted under torture while law enforcement officials implicated in human rights violations during the armed conflict in Chechnya, walk free.

“The legitimate aim of tackling armed groups and bringing stability to the region cannot be achieved by illegitimate means and measures that violate international humanitarian law,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“Neither can stability be achieved solely through the badly needed reconstruction of buildings, roads and energy supplies of the last years in Chechnya.”

“Only thorough and independent investigations into past and continuing human rights abuses can bring normalization and security and can heal the pain experienced by the victims. Such investigations will also be a deterrent to future violations.”

Over 15 years Amnesty International has consistently investigated and brought to light cases of human rights abuses, including war crimes, in the North Caucasus. The organization has been exposing the lack of accountability in spite of the barriers imposed by the Russian authorities on its representatives as well as those of other human rights organizations and independent observers to visit the region.

“Opening the region to independent observers and journalists would be a signal that the authorities there are ready for transparency and dialogue,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“Without true respect for the rule of law from all sides, and a genuine commitment to address the festering legacy left by the blatant failure of political will at all levels to prevent and punish a catalogue of grievous abuses, there can be no stability and security for the people of the North Caucasus.”