

# Human rights violations in Chechnya and Ingushetia

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On April 8 Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and Memorial published a joint statement condemning human rights violations in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

The statement calls “on the government of the Russian Federation to take immediate steps to bring an end to the human rights abuses in Chechnya and Ingushetia.” It further urges “the international community to hold the Russian government to its obligations under international human rights standards” and in particular calls on the United Nation’s Commission on Human Rights to adopt “a strong resolution regarding the situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia.”

This appeal was timed to coincide with the UN commission’s 60th session that ended last week.

The second war by the Russian federation on Chechnya, which is now in its fourth year, was marked from the beginning by enormous brutality against Chechen independence fighters and the civilian population alike. Thousands of civilians have lost their lives through indiscriminate bombing and shelling by Russian forces. Even though the Russian army can claim nominal control over most of the country, thousands of Chechens continue to fight.

The response to the ongoing resistance against the military occupation has been met with violent suppression of the civilian population. The war has more and more been waged against the whole of the Chechen people. For example, regular raids on people’s houses have been carried out with utmost brutality, civilians have been regularly beaten and their possessions often looted.

Apart from terrorising the population these raids are aimed at detaining alleged rebel fighters or those who

are suspected of collaborating with the rebels. Many of those detained have subsequently disappeared or have been found dead with marks consistent with them having been tortured.

Statements by pro-Moscow Chechen officials reported that on average two people went missing every day in the first half of 2003, many of them after being detained by Russian forces. The Russian human rights group Memorial documented 294 disappearances between January and November 2003, of which 47 were later found dead, but estimates the real number to be three or four times higher.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled the fighting into neighbouring Ingushetia, many of whom were put up in tent camps. These tent camps became the scene for further human rights violations by Russian or pro-Moscow Chechen forces against the displaced people. In 2003 the Russian government tried to portray the situation in Chechnya as having been normalised. With that aim in mind a stage-managed referendum and later parliamentary elections were organised. This was accompanied by repressive measures designed to close down the camps in Ingushetia.

The joint statement claims that this situation is deteriorating further. In relation to Chechnya it claims, based on figures supplied by Memorial, that in the first quarter of 2004 at least 30 civilians died in the continued fighting. A further 78 people were abducted, of whom 41 disappeared.

Another report released by the group Care of Victims of Torture gives the first substantial body of evidence on incidents of rape during the war. This report is based on medical and psychological documentation of 35 asylum-seekers from the Chechnya conflict at the medical foundation’s treatment centre in London. It

also documents other forms of torture and ill treatment, including repeated kicking, beating and burning. The medical foundation's doctors have documented shoulder dislocations, fractures and damaged kidneys.

In Ingushetia, four large tent camps have been closed in the last six months, leaving only one in Satsita. In order to resettle the tent population Russian and Chechen officials promised them compensation for lost property. At the same time, they were threatened they would lose their right to humanitarian aid if they did not return to Chechnya and threatened them with false charges such as possession of ammunition or drugs.

Most of those forced to return to Chechnya were sheltered in temporary accommodation centres, which according to the signatories of the joint statement do not meet international standards. Rooms are hopelessly overcrowded, there is no running water or functioning sewage system, and humanitarian food supplies are irregular and insufficient.

According to people living in the centre interviewed by Human Rights Watch and Memorial researchers, the compensation promises by the government have not materialised. Most of these people have complained that their papers were not being processed, or that their names had disappeared from the lists of those entitled to compensation.

The statement further points out that human rights violations that have long been the hallmark of the Chechnya conflict are spilling over into Ingushetia. Memorial has received dozens of reports of "disappearances" in 2004 alone. Human rights groups have also documented a number of summary executions in recent months and attacks against civilians resulting in deaths and serious injuries.

The 60th session of the UN Human Rights Commission failed to pass resolutions condemning the violations in Chechnya. This is consistent with the response of the Western powers and their institutions, which have ignored Russian human rights abuses during the entire period of the Chechen campaign that started in 1999. This was a quid pro quo for Russia's support or tacit acceptance of US and Western aggression in the Balkans, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq. To condemn Russia's abuses would also invite similar condemnation of actions taken by the US.

After the 9/11 atrocity in New York and the launching of Washington's supposed "war on terror,"

the two campaigns became interlinked by claims that the Chechen rebels have connections to Al Qaeda and actively supported and participated in acts of terror around the world.

As a trade-off, the Russia government has not raised any criticisms of human rights violations carried out by their US counterparts.

The UN Human Rights Commission failed to even mention the situation in Iraq or pass a resolution addressing the plight of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

*See Human Rights Watch on Chechnya*  
<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/russia/chechnya/>



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