

To: Health Professionals

From: Health and Human Rights Team

Date: May 2005

MEDICAL ACTION UPDATE

Ingushetia, Russian Federation:

Doctors publicly branded as terrorists

Summary:

Fourteen women doctors in the Russian Republic of Ingushetia have repeatedly had their pictures and names distributed by the Russian authorities on posters, in the media and on the Internet. The women, all of whom reside in Ingushetia, and work for the International Medical Corps (IMC) were declared as “wanted on suspicion of their involvement in terrorist activities.”

The pictures were circulated on numerous occasions throughout 2004 and 2005, initially following the 6 February 2004 bomb attacks on the Moscow metro as well as after the September 2004 crisis in Beslan. Such exposure continued despite assurances from the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) of the Russian Federation in May 2004 to both the IMC and the doctors that the pictures would be withdrawn and not distributed any further.

Update:

The Nazran District Court of Ingushetia in December 2004 declared the actions of the MVD and the Main Department of Internal Affairs (GUVD) of Moscow to be illegal and demanded that all posters of the doctors should be removed and destroyed.

Despite this, according to the IMC, the poster was seen again, at least on one occasion, in a public place in Moscow on 14 February 2005 among photographs of other wanted persons. Representatives from the IMC managed to take photographs of the poster and complained to the Ingush administration which led to a meeting with the President of Ingushetia. Subsequently, a meeting was arranged between the doctors and high level officials in Moscow, which took place on 4 March 2005 at the Duma. Present at the meeting were the Deputy Chair of the Federation Council, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, a representative of the Federal Security Services (FSB), a Federation Council Member, representatives from the Duma Committee on Human Rights and journalists.

At the meeting, while acknowledging that the allegations against the doctors were unfounded, reportedly neither the MVD nor the FSB were prepared to take responsibility. However, both agreed to the demands of the Deputy Chair of the Federation Council that all the posters should be removed, including those from websites. Additionally, the MVD have since issued the doctors with picture ID cards stating that they have no criminal or “terrorist” associations.

The MVD appealed to the Supreme Court of Ingushetia the decision of the Nazran District Court of Ingushetia of December 2004. On 10 March 2005 a judicial collegiate for civil cases of the Supreme Court of Ingushetia upheld the initial decision by the Nazran District Court. It seems unlikely that the MVD will make a further appeal. Separately, the doctors are seeking compensation for the moral harm suffered.

No further action is necessary on this case. Thank you to all those who campaigned on behalf of the IMC doctors.