

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 46/045/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 202
25 October 2007

Embargo Date: 25 October 2007 00:01 GMT

Russian Federation: Do not repeat mistakes made in Chechnya

The Russian and Ingush authorities must not repeat mistakes made in Chechnya, Amnesty International warned, as an increasing number of enforced disappearances, abductions and other human rights violations mark the rapidly deteriorating situation in Ingushetia, Chechnya's neighbour in the Russian Federation.

"When dealing with the volatile situation in Ingushetia, the Russian authorities must act in line with the law, in particular by ensuring that all detentions are carried out in accordance with Russian law and international human rights standards," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

On the eve of the forthcoming European Union-Russia summit in Portugal on 26 October, Amnesty International urges the Russian Federation to abide by international standards it has signed up to. Russian and Ingush authorities must ensure that all actions of its security forces are carried out according to international standards and Russian law. Observing the rule of law, including human rights law, has to be at the heart of the response to the security crisis in Ingushetia.

"The often complete disregard for the rule of law by the Russian federal forces during the conflict in Chechnya and the impunity with which they abducted, tortured and disappeared members of the local population have scarred the lives of thousands of people and undermined Russia's international standing. A repeat of the same tactics in Ingushetia is unacceptable," Nicola Duckworth said.

Law enforcement officials are reportedly conducting document checks and detentions in Ingushetia without identifying themselves, and in some cases wearing masks. In an apparently punitive raid on the village of Ali Yurt in July 2007 villagers were reportedly rounded up and beaten, while seven men were detained and taken to the building of the Federal Security Services in Magas where some were reportedly ill-treated. At least three men have been shot dead in the town of Nazran by law enforcement officers over the course of the year; while the authorities have stated that those had put up armed resistance, witnesses to the killings claim that the men were summarily executed. Similar incidents have been reported in the towns of Malgobek and Karabulak.

Three men are still missing after being abducted in Ingushetia this year. A fourth man's whereabouts remain unknown, after he went missing in March. Other men have been released, having been abducted; some have been ill-treated or held in secret detention, including in pits dug in the ground. A number of other ethnic Ingush men are reported to have gone missing in neighbouring North Ossetia. Their relatives believe they may have been detained by law enforcement officials and subsequently disappeared.

Ibragim Gazdiev, an ethnic Ingush, was, according to witnesses, seized by armed men in camouflage, at 12.54pm on 8 August 2007 in Karabulak, in the Russian Republic of Ingushetia. He has not been seen or heard from since and according to unofficial information, might be being held in incommunicado detention in Ingushetia or in a neighbouring North Caucasus republic. The authorities however have officially denied that Ibragim Gazdiev is being held in detention and Amnesty International has grave concerns for his safety. The prosecutor's office is reported to have opened a criminal investigation into Ibragim Gazdiev's abduction.

"The Russian and Ingush authorities must put an immediate end to these human rights violations, and investigate all allegations effectively. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Russia was responsible for grave human rights violations in the second Chechen conflict in 18 separate cases so far, and is due to consider many more. These violations must not be repeated with regard to Ingushetia," Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International is also concerned about human rights abuses reportedly committed by armed groups against civilians, including abductions. The organization has also received information that unknown gunmen are committing numerous attacks against civilians: members of ethnic Russian families have been killed and a bomb exploded at a funeral held for one of the victims, injuring several people; members of a Roma family, two Korean men and a Dagestani family have also been killed during such attacks. At the same time, armed groups have launched attacks, often fatal, against members of law enforcement agencies in Ingushetia.

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