

HR news

Press-conference 16 November 1999 on the situation in Chechnya and Ingushetia

Participating: representatives of the Human Rights Center of Memorial, the Committee Civic Assistance and Amnesty International.

Press-release

Representatives of Memorial and the Committee Civic Assistance were in the Republic of Ingushetia **from 6 to 14 November 1999**, together with representatives of amnesty international. They gathered testimony on living conditions of Chechen refugees *[For reasons of simplicity this paper will not distinguish between refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons) but use the word refugee for all who have fled their original places of residence due to Russian forces operations in Chechnya]*, questioning them in their accommodation facilities, in hospitals, at border checkpoints on their way to neighboring Ingushetia, at train stations and other such places.

We can affirm that the war against terrorism, which the Russian government proclaims to be the main objective of military operations in Chechnya, leads to suffering and death of peaceful civilians in this region of Russia, resulting in mutilations, civilians' loss of health and destruction of their homes. There are now as many refugees on the territory of the republic of Ingushetia as citizens living there on a regular basis.

1. Based on refugees' testimonies, gathered in separate interviews on different locations at different times, we affirm that the second half of October / the beginning of November Russian forces continued to carry out indiscriminate air strikes, rocket attacks and artillery strikes on inhabited localities, which led to widespread casualties among peaceful civilians.

Examples:

- the rocket attack of 21 October 1999 on the central market place in Grozny, as a result of which more than 140 people died and more than 200 people were wounded. The absolute majority of those killed and wounded were peaceful civilians, among them women and children.



Zhulehan Asuhanova, 14 years old, whose right arm had to be amputated as a result of the rocket attack on Grozny on 21 October 1999.

- the rocket attack on the village of Novi Sharoi in the night of October 22./23. More than 16 of the villagers were killed and wounded, among them 8 to 14 year old children. One wounded child - Dzhovbatyrov Sultan, 9 years old - is now in Hospital No. 1 in the District of Sunzhenskoi in Ingushetia.
- the bombing-rocket raid and artillery fire on the village of Novi Sharoi on 27 October, as a result of which villagers were killed and wounded, among them children. One wounded child - Jusul Junusovich Magomadov, 14 years old, whose both legs had to be amputated - is now in Hospital No. 1 in the District of Sunzhenskoi in Ingushetia.
- the bombing-rocket raid on the village of Samashki on 23 and 25 October, in the night of October 26./27. and during daytime on 27 October. As a result of these attacks a lot of people died and were wounded among the villagers. The gravest result had the strike of 27 October. For example, under the eyes of Chamsat Aschadovny Amaevoi a grenade explosion killed his first cousin Sarah Mutieva and his niece Emina, 12 years old. A grenade hitting the house of the Mutievy family (Ulitsa Lenina 19) killed Lina Debrieva (12 years old) and Sara Magomedovna Borsoeva (47 years old), and seriously wounded Esila Abutalipovna Debrisheva (35 years old), who is now in an Ingushetian hospital. Selimchan Ikun, 14 years old, lost his right leg and is now in Hospital No. 2 in the District of Sunzhenskoi in Ingushetia. Madina Avtorchanova, 22 years old, who is now in Hospital No. 1 of the District of Sunzhenskoi in Ingushetia, received shrapnel wounds in the right thigh and has both upper arms broken.
- the bombing-rocket raid on 27 October on Grozny on Ulitsa Lenina in the district of the store "Luch". Media reported that this day federal troops launched a rocket attack on the house of Schamil Basaev, who has indeed two houses in this district. As a result of the rocket attack, launched between 11 and 12 h, these houses were partly destroyed. But this rocket attack and the following bombing also destroyed bordering blocks - not less than five two-story buildings with 12 flats each, one five-story building and many of the one-story private homes. This caused widespread death and injuries among the residents living in these houses. Moreover, some cars standing at the taxi stop near by with drivers and passengers were completely destroyed.
- On 8 November 7 people died and 12 were injured in the settlement of Gikalo when rockets attacked a house on Ulitsa Rabochei. From Gikalo died: Arsanukaev Said, born 1977, Suleimanov Ruslan, born 1977, Vachaeva Rosa Isaevna, pensioner. Moreover died Chanpashev Nurdi Ibragimovich, born 1953, Vicengiriev Chussein Vachovich, born 1973, and Israpilov Vacha, born 1976, as well as Vagapova Raisa Suleimanovna and three of her children, who had fled from the Naurskoi District before.
- There is evidence from refugees, that air strikes are carried out on any gathering of people or cars on the countryside. Rocket and bombing raids have even been launched on funeral ceremonies. On 29 October Russian forces have fired on a funeral procession in the village of Starye Atagi, when Tamara Chinaeva was buried, who died on 27 October in Grozny in the district of the store „Luch". Three people were killed. In the mountain village of Itum-Kal on 30 October a funeral procession coming back from the graveyard came under bombing attack, just having buried people who died in the attack launched at the Rostov-Baku highway on 29 October. Saluev Salid Magomed, 30 years old, and his son, whose condition is critical, were both wounded then and are now in Hospital No. 2 of the Sunzhenskoi District. 5 other people were killed in this attack.



Taus Shaipov, 50 years old, and his 8 year old daughter Asja were wounded during a rocket attack on the village of Gehy on 18 October 1999.

There is more evidence on other similar incidents of Russian aircraft and artillery indiscriminately attacking civilians and civilian targets.

2. Chechen civilians flee Chechnya, saving their lives and the lives of their relatives and close ones from air strikes and artillery attack.

Meanwhile conditions en route to Ingushetia are dangerous. There is a lack of „humanitarian corridors" for peaceful civilians, offering a secure way out of dangerous zones. Only so-called „gates" out of embattled districts exist, but it is not safe to get there. The roads leading to them are under artillery and aircraft attack.

The attack on the refugee track on 29 October on the Rostov-Baku Highway is the most-grave such incident. However, the highway has come under artillery and aircraft attack before, though never this intensively, for example on 28 October, 4 and 6 November. These attacks also led to casualties among civilians. Other roads have come under attack as well. In particular, the road from the village of Starye Atagi to the mountainous Shatoiski District has been under constant attack - as a result of which the civilians wanting to leave the embattled area have no possibility to escape the frequent bombings.

3. It is more difficult for civilians to leave the conflict zones now, than it has been a month ago.

From 22 October to 1 November the administrative frontier between Chechnya and Ingushetia was closed. Then refugees started to leave Chechnya, but relatively fast and without problems only people travelling on foot were able to cross the boarder. Cars have been held up at the checkpoint „Kavkas 1" at least for a couple of days. The criteria applied to let people pass or hold them back is unclear. For example, 16 felons, who are on a federal "wanted" list, were able to pass the border control, being hold back only later by Ingushetian *Milizia*. Also, people who have past the border control complain about blackmailing habits among the soldiers.

Moreover, people arriving on the border checkpoint „Kavkas 1" from Chechnya are „filtrated": Some are hold back and sent to a so called „filtration point" in Mozdok. There is no information available on the situation at this filtration camp.

International organizations ought to demand transparency on the system by which people are being kept back.

4. According to information of the Migration Service of the Republic of Ingushetia on 13 November 1999 there are:

- 192.800 people registered in the republic who fled from Chechnya (45.304 families);
- 38 people from Ingushetia who came to use the temporary accommodation facilities (11 families);
- 13.807 people who went to other Russian regions to relatives or friends by train;
- 7.764 people who went to Northern regions of Chechnya;
- 1.846 people who went to Georgia.

After 1 November 1999

- 36.175 people entered Ingushetia;
- 7.893 people left Ingushetia for Chechnya;
- there are 22.000 places for temporary accommodation in Ingushetia;
- among those 22.000 approx. 10.000 are accommodations in railroad cars.

The Ingushetian Ministry for Emergency Situations still has 8.000 places in tents. In the meantime, at least 1.500 people are leaving Chechnya every single day.

The considerable measures, which have been taken by Ingushetian authorities for the refugees' provision with food and accommodation, do not yet allow to exclude an extreme and uncontrollable worsening of the situation. There are not enough tents and railroad cars, and in those available heating does not work properly. Already at present many cars are over-crowded. In some cars meant for 6 people, 12 people or more are living, in many tents meant for 10, there are more than 15 people. We saw tents where on sleeping space for 10 people 30 people were accommodated. Meanwhile, the amount of food distributed is related to the amount of space and does not relate to the number of people.

There is a lack of drinking water. Although nobody is starving, the amount of food available is far from sufficient. Very often there is no place to cook. In the train wagons next to the city of Karabulak, where refugees lived until the end of October, the centralized provision of people with warm food was only possible twice during the whole period of their stay, because there was neither gas nor drinking water.

In contradiction to the assertion of the Ministry for Emergency Situations, that there are functioning sanitary facilities, refugees have not been able to wash themselves from the moment of their arrival until the present time. According to the representative of the Russian Ministry for Health Arsanukaev Magamed Aslambekovich, there are many cases of pedicular disease, the number of people suffering from scab is growing, and most of the people have grave respiratory problems. We saw children with pedicular disease. In addition, there is a growing number of people with dysentery.

In particular the approaching winter is posing problems. There is not enough firewood and coal to provide the tents and railroad cars with heating. In a number of cars there is either no heating at all or the heating does not work. In addition, there is a shortage of water, necessary for the heating system of the railroad cars. Three cold days in the second half of November in Ingushetia literally brought many refugees to the edge of survival.

It is evident, that the military operations in Chechnya are an armed conflict of a non-international nature. Federal authorities, who regardless of such evidence call this an "anti-terrorist operation" (last time it was called a "destruction of the forming of bandits") are trying to take the events out of the context of international humanitarian law and therewith away from international control. Meanwhile, the OSCE still has a mandate for the observance of human rights and international humanitarian law in the conflict zone. All the international organizations concerned are obliged to observe the situation in the North Caucasus as well as the whole of Russia intently.