

PRESSEINFORMATION

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS KEY TO NORMALIZATION IN NORTH CAUCASUS

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG DES BERICHTS *RULE WITHOUT LAW: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS* (VERÖFFENTLICHT 1.7.2009, 48 SEITEN, ENGLISCH)

1 July 2009 - Normalization in the North Caucasus is impossible without a complete end to human rights violations and full accountability for the grievous human rights violations carried out over the past decade, according to a new Amnesty International report.

Published on Wednesday, *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.

The report is based on testimonies that tell of indiscriminate killings, excessive use of force, 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.

The counter-terrorism operation that the Russian authorities declared in Chechnya, 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. The civilian population continues to live in an atmosphere of lawlessness that engenders fear and insecurity.

"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," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia programme. "Perpetrators of human rights violations – both past and present – too often walk free."

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.

Armed groups throughout the region have killed hundreds of law enforcement officials and large numbers of civilians over recent years. In June, the deputy head of the Supreme Court of Ingushetia and the Interior Minister of Dagestan were assassinated.

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. Despite this, 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 on 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."

