



## CHECHNYA PEACE FORUM

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### **Human Rights Abuses in Chechnya**

The central argument of the Chechnya Peace Forum is that something must be done to end the appalling human rights abuses that continue there. The reality is that disappearances, torture, and secret detention centres remain common place in Chechnya under President Ramzan Kadyrov's regime of fear and oppression.

Investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya was an out spoken critic of human rights violations in Chechnya and tirelessly reported on these horrific atrocities right up until her brutal murder in October 2006. During the continuing conflict nearly a million Chechens have been displaced and 100,000 killed – mostly civilians.

It is no secret that hostility towards defenders of human rights has increased under Vladimir Putin. The draconian restrictions imposed on NGOs demonstrate the urgent need for action at national, European and International level. Many leading human rights organisations have been forced to suspend operations in Russia. A new law requires foreign pro-democracy groups and charities to concede to new measures designed to curb freedom of speech.

Attempts to silence those who speak out and Putin's propaganda that the war is over cannot mask the truth. There is overwhelming evidence from human rights organizations of continuing war crimes in Chechnya. In June 2006 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe examined Russia's progress in honouring obligations and commitments it undertook when joining the Council of Europe in 1996. It passed a resolution stating there had been progress in some areas of human rights but very little in bringing those responsible for human rights violations to justice. Notably in relation to events in Chechnya. The resolution also called for effective action to put an immediate end to "disappearances", torture, arbitrary detentions, incommunicado detention in illegal and secret detention facilities, and unlawful killings.

The reality is that civilians in Chechnya continue to be held in detention in undisclosed locations by Chechen security forces under the command of Ramzan Kadyrov, and federal forces. According to Human Rights Watch their September 2006 mission to the region documented 82 cases of torture by Kadyrov's forces, 54 of these took place in 2006. Whilst in November 2006 Human Rights Watch submitted a report to the United Nations Committee on Torture Convention claiming it had uncovered evidence of 10 separate secret detention centers with torture facilities in Chechnya.

The Moscow installed government in Chechnya admitted in June 2005 that there were more than 50 mass graves on its territory. In June 2006 Russian human rights group Memorial

claimed it had found evidence of a former Russian dungeon in Grozny where prisoners were tortured. The dungeon was in a former school for deaf children. Alavadi Sadykov, who spent three months in the prison in 2000, is missing his left ear. He told Memorial that his captors had cut it off. *"They would put you face down on a bench... then they placed a board on you and hit it with a hammer, beating your internal organs"* (BBC News Online 9.06.06)

The Human Rights movement is doing a lot of work around The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The aim is to put pressure on world leaders to call for the Russian Federation to end human rights abuses in Chechnya. This Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 and stipulates in Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

The international community must put human rights at the heart of it's dealings with Russia and not be diverted by our reliance on their oil and gas. Denial and turning a blind eye is not a sustainable option as President Putin continues to move towards an increasingly authoritarian style of government, and firms up his position to control the political landscape in Russia for a long time to come.