

Chechnya, back to Hell

March 2004



Photo : Jean-Michel Papazian



I. Introduction and recommendations

There is no conflict in Chechnya: that's what the Russian government and the Chechen one in place since October 2003 are striving to demonstrate, both in word and practice.

To both, the lack of security in Chechnya is only residual, and is not an obstacle neither to the reconstruction of the territory and its institutions, nor to the return (supposedly voluntary) of Chechen displaced in Ingushetia since 1999.

As further proof, in 2003 a referendum and presidential elections were held in Chechnya, and the closing of displaced tent camps in Ingushetia began; this process should be completed in the spring of 2004.

But the reality of Chechens' daily life in Ingushetia and in Chechnya, as it was observed by three international humanitarian organizations running operations in Northern Caucasus for several years, denies this so-called return to normality.

First, although displaced populations in Ingushetia do not want to return to Chechnya due to lack of security there, they are compelled to do so by all kinds of means: promises of aid in Chechnya and other incentives to return; threats and coercive measures against families wishing to remain in Ingushetia; hindrances created by the authorities to the establishment of assistance programs in arrival sites for displaced persons, even as the humanitarian situation there is deteriorating every day; multiplication of police and military operations in the populated areas; dismantlement of official camps without any relocation options offered to those evicted.

Second, back in Chechnya, the civilian population suffers the consequences of a conflict that is happening behind closed doors. Its symptoms are visible in every detail of daily life : destroyed infrastructures, means of production in ruin, family economies left lifeless, drastically reduced access to healthcare, permanence of war injuries, large number of landmines in the territory.

Therefore, Action contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde and Handicap International:

- Request that the General Secretary of the United Nations produce a report on the state of human security in Chechnya and Ingushetia.
- Request that the international community put pressure on all participants to the conflict to guarantee the respect of fundamental rights of Chechens in Chechnya and Ingushetia.
- Request that the international community, in concert with the Russian and Chechen authorities, guarantees to Chechen displaced persons in Ingushetia who do not wish to return to Chechnya access to decent alternatives – access to shelter and humanitarian aid in Ingushetia.
- Alert the international community to the risk that humanitarian aid be used as a tool in the policy of forcing populations to return to conflict zones.

This report is based on facts gathered by the three NGOs during their humanitarian interventions onsite and backed by interviews of witnesses whose identity remains undisclosed for security reasons.

II. Forced Return of Displaced in Ingushetia : The Final Stage

A) Background

Since the beginning of the second war in Chechnya, in the fall of 1999, an endless stream of families has fled daily terror, primarily toward Ingushetia.

Close to 200,000 Chechens have thus found shelter, either in tents set up in official camps, or in private rented accommodations, or in unofficial tent camps – “compact units”- put up in factories that in some cases were still in operation, in farms or in abandoned barns.

The Federal government’s will to repatriate the Chechens displaced in Ingushetia was clearly stated in official declarations since the beginning of the second conflict, and has been strengthened in the past few months, as shown by recent statements made by Russian or pro-Russian authorities:

“The leaders of the Chechen Republic administration have [taken hold] within the displaced populations who live in refugee sites in Ingushetia and whose houses have not been destroyed, in order to persuade them to return to their permanent residence. The task of redirecting humanitarian activities of international NGOs in Chechnya continues.”

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation¹

“There must not be one [displaced] tent left on the Ingush territory after March 1st”

Mr. Dabiyev, spokesperson for the State Council of Chechnya²

“The official tent camps in Ingushetia will be closed by March 1st”

Mr. Isayev, Chechen Prime Minister³

On May 29, 2002, this will was made official in a formal repatriation plan drafted by the Russian and Ingush government. The plan envisions the return of all the displaced before the end of 2002, the dismantlement of the reception infrastructures in Ingushetia “depending on the movements” of populations, and the start of “discussions with international NGOs regarding the redirection of most of the humanitarian aid to Chechnya.”

In connection with this planned return, which has been delayed owing in part to logistical constraints, fund providers, United Nations and Russian authorities agree on one point: the return of the displaced Chechen can only take place on a voluntary basis, opposed to the physically forced return.

¹ Source: Department of Press and Information, February 12, 2004

² Source: Interfax, January 10

³ Source: Ria Novosti, January 8

The concept of voluntary action is however not restricted to this definition. For instance, the UNHCR defines voluntary repatriation as follows: “repatriation can be qualified as voluntary when refugees, after receiving all available information relating to their original zone, freely decide to return home.”

However, the measures of coercion used by the authorities against the displaced persons as well as their conditions of life give evidence that they are compelled to return to Chechnya.

B) Displaced under pressure to go back

A large majority of the displaced persons do not want to go home because they fear for their lives. Less than 5% of the families displaced in Ingushetia⁴ declared some time ago that they wished to return in the months to come. The main reason quoted was the lack of physical safety on the Chechen territory.

Alina

“We are afraid to go back; even in the PVRs [temporary receiving centers in Chechnya], it’s not safe. A few weeks ago, masked and armed men raided a PVR in the Staropromislovsky area.

My husband was arrested once by the Russians, he stayed in their hands for 3 months until we found enough money to get him out. We paid 15,000 rubles to get him out. Now he’s working to pay back this money.

For us, what most important is safety. We just want to live quietly. We’re not afraid to work.

We just want to go to bed at night and sleep until the next day without a calamity happening.

Around me, there are 4 persons that have disappeared after being arrested by the military or security services.”

Kheda

“I want to go home [in Grozny], but not right now. Right now the outlaws are running the place. Diverse groups of armed men, Kadirov’s units and others, there are a lot of rumors about them. If you pass them on the road, they could start shooting, they can do anything they want: kill people, insult them or kill them with complete impunity. It’s not safe in Chechnya, if they run special operations they arrest whomever they want for no reason, I know that. In addition, there are a lot of explosions on the roads or surface landmines. You can easily become a victim of that kind of thing also.”

⁴ Food safety investigation led by Action contre la Faim (France) in February 2003, involving 1581 families; MSF-France investigation of February 2003. The trend was confirmed in November 2003 by a new investigation by AAH (France) conducted among its beneficiaries – less than 6% of the persons interviewed declared they wanted to return to Chechnya.

- **A population lacking status, and progressively going underground**

Though Russian law does not contain the concept of “internally displaced person”, an analogy can be made with “forced migrants,” defined by a 1995 federal statute as “citizens of the Russian Federation that were forced to leave their permanent place of residence” due to violence or threats of violence and persecution.

The evolution in the manner in which the status of “forced migrant” has been granted by the Russian authorities since the first war is an indication of how the government perceives the current conflict in Chechnya: whereas most of the internally displaced persons⁵ in the first war were granted this status, during the second war it was given only to self-declared victims of “Chechen Islamic groups”, never to victims of Federal forces. According to the HCR, only 89 Chechens displaced in Ingushetia succeeded in obtaining this status during the second war⁶.

Deprived of any legal recognition, the displaced persons nevertheless benefited from administrative recognition, which entitled them to certain rights. Indeed “Document 7”, distributed by the Service of migration, gives the recipients access to Federal humanitarian aid, in particular to free accommodation in a tent camp and to food distributions.

This document has not been distributed by the authorities since April 2001, and can even be withdrawn, during police controls of physical presence, especially in official tent camps and collective centers.

For instance, between November 6 and November 10, 2003, a team of 6 Russian policemen checked all the tents in all the camps, every day. The individuals absent at the time of these inspections were excluded from the Federal lists, even if they were in fact permanently living in the tent camps, but had been outside when the inspections took place.

In late December, displaced persons in the Sputnik camp who were on the official list were threatened to lose Federal return aid if they did not ask to be removed from the lists.

On January 28, 2004, representatives of the Chechen regional administration visited the tent camps. In their hands were lists indicating the physical condition of the original village homes of the displaced persons. Based on these lists, displaced individuals whose homes were livable were struck from the official lists. In numerous cases, according to the displaced, these lists were wrong.

Finally, the endless turnover of the official representatives in charge of the repatriation program makes it impossible for the displaced persons to bring their claims to anybody who would be in a position to follow up on them: a few weeks after starting their functions, the managers of the camps are called back, put on leave and replaced.

⁵ 162,000 displaced persons throughout the Russian Federation obtained this status during the first war, compared to less than 15,000 during the second conflict.

⁶ HCR report on applicants to refugee status from the Russian Federation in the context of Chechnya – February 2003.

▪ **Threats, promises, police and military inflicted terror: a population harassed daily**

Every day, representatives of different services of the Chechen administration visit the tent camps, inviting people to go home, “helping” them to fill out forms, registering them on transportation lists. Trucks for the transport of displaced persons back to Chechnya were made available by the Service of migration, and are permanently parked at the entrance of the camps.

The same technique is used for each visit: announcement that the camps are about to close, promises about the availability of collective housing in Chechnya, about the financial aid supposed to cover the rent in Chechnya. Individuals applying for indemnification for their destroyed house in Chechnya have to sign a contract with the authorities in which they acknowledge their “obligation to voluntarily [sic] leave the camp within 7 days⁷.”

Zulfia

“I don’t want to leave. We’ve been threatened: if we don’t apply (for a PVR or to return to Chechnya) we will get no help at all.

Last week, some Russians and Chechens came, and they threatened us by telling us ‘if you don’t go, we’ll tear up your tents, and you’ll just have to figure out a way to live’.”

Adam, Satistia

“We’ve been living here since the camp was opened. There are four of us, my husband, our two children and myself. In 2001, we increased the size of our tent and paid for it ourselves. About the present situation, I can say that people talk, but they are not going anywhere. For now, there are still 300 tents in the camp. People have to leave, because everyday individuals visit them to ask them to go back. Who are these individuals? Twice a week, Kadyrov’s militias from Grozny come to ask questions and take notes; then the village leader comes everyday and asks only one question: ‘why don’t you go back? Go home!’ This is the second month he’s doing this every single day. Then he goes and tells the elders of the village that such and such family doesn’t want to go back, and threatens to collect a tax for their land (...) At the camp office they tell us ‘leave, leave; if people don’t leave we’ll burn their tents’. We didn’t have any water for two weeks, the day water came back they cut off electrical power. A day and a half later, again they cut off water; now we’re expecting them to cut off gas.”

According to the persons who were interviewed, the displaced who refuse to go home must confirm it in a letter to be transmitted to the Chechen branch of the Federal service of migrations. From that point on they are barred from holding a *propiska*⁸ in Chechnya for five years.

The psychological pressure on the displaced population, resulting from a combination of incentives to return and threats, has further increased with the growing presence of armed forces on the Ingush territory since 2002. Joint “anti-terrorism” military and police operations, aiming to uncover and destroy weapon and human caches within the

⁷ Paragraph 4 of the document permitting indemnification, executed between the displaced persons and the committee for indemnification payments.

⁸ Residence permit, required for all Russian citizens.

displaced population, have multiplied. In September 2003, after the attack against the FSB⁹ building, in Magas, Ingushetia, dozens of displaced persons were arbitrarily arrested; a military and police roadblock was placed immediately at the entrance of most of the official tent camps, only letting through individuals having received a prior authorization.

In December 2003, armed and masked forces kidnapped several displaced persons. Their families have not had access to their place of detention.

On March 6, 2004, at 5am, 6 to 8 reinforced vehicles and tens of military jeeps surrounded the Satsita tent camp to launch a joint operation between the Chechen and Russian forces. Some Chechen bearing masks, and some unmasked Russians, all armed, entered all the tents, checked passports, in some cases torn the floors. At 9 am, they attempted to take with them seven men. Women protested by surrounding the vehicles. The Chechen and Russian forces only then released the “suspects” and left, threatening to return.

For the displaced, police controls have thus become a daily occurrence even inside the tent camps.

▪ **The deterioration of the living conditions in the camps, a real incentive to go home**

After four years in Ingushetia, most of the displaced families can no longer provide for their basic needs.

Less than 30% of the displaced had a job in Ingushetia in February 2003, vs. 50% a year before. A symptom of an out-of-breath economy, the loss of capital – sale of personal assets and indebtedness – constitutes an act of ultimate desperation for displaced families who, since their arrival, have progressively exhausted their resources. After selling their jewelry, they now liquidate their equipment assets. In January 2003, 58% of the families were in debt, and the loans had been incurred in particular in order to pay for or improve their housing arrangement.

As the living conditions of displaced populations keep deteriorating, humanitarian aid, and in particular, food aid, has shrunk in the last two years : in February 2002, food distributions covered 134% of the daily theoretical caloric needs of the displaced¹⁰. The resale of a portion of the food aid was a vital resource for the families, enabling them to cover some of their other needs. Today, food aid hardly covers 75% of their daily theoretic caloric needs, partly since the Federal government interrupts food distributions (bread distributions stopped in March 2002, increasingly erratic distributions of other food staples – rice, sugar, oil, meat).

Access to health care and education is also becoming more limited. For instance, both the school and the clinic in the Satstita camp were closed in early March. The NGO in charge of managing humanitarian infrastructures (clinic, school, food distribution, water management) had to cease its operations and transfer them to the local authorities.

⁹ Federal Service of Security, ex-KGB

¹⁰ Source: Report on food security in Ingushetia, Action contre la Faim (France), February 2002

Irina

"The Ministry of Social Affairs has not been giving us any aid for 15 months, and we are receiving very little: a little bit of flour and a small box of food; it's far from enough.

Here, we are treated as persons of 'second zone'. I delivered my baby 10 days ago. When I started to feel the contractions, my sister and I went to the Sleptsovsk hospital (where the Sputnik tent camp is located). There, they refused to take me in, they sent me back and told me to go have my baby at home, in Chechnya. I had to take the bus to Malgobek, which is an hour away, in pain due to the contractions. In Malgobek at the hospital, they also tried to stop me from going in, I had to pay 2,000 rubles (60 Euros) for them to let me deliver finally. There are some rumors that Kadyrov may have given orders that Chechen refugees no longer be accepted in hospitals in Ingushetia."

Evicted from the camps or anticipating their closing, unable to obtain private housing, the displaced who refuse to return to Chechnya keep moving within Ingushetia, massing up in collective centers. An investigation conducted by Action contre la Faim among the new arrivals in the "kompakt units" revealed in December 2003 that 16% were arriving directly from Chechnya, 42% from official camps – the Alina camp was closed in December 2003 – and 42% from the private sector – unable to pay their rent or subject to increasing police controls in the private sector.

But the great majority of the "kompakt units" are unsanitary : 83% of the collective shelters in Nazran, Karabulak and Sleptovskaia (about 23,000 people) fail to meet minimum sanitary standards: collective showers and toilets are non-existent or insufficient, and there is a shortage of points of access to water.

The NGOs' efforts to satisfy the increasing humanitarian needs of the displaced populations are meeting the resistance of the authorities, who speak a double-language. On one hand, the NGOs are accused to do too much, and to cause the displaced population to become sedentary¹¹, and on the other hand, the authorities justify the need for the Chechen to go home by their unsanitary living conditions in Ingushetia.

"My tour of the three refugee camps has convinced me once more that any normal person would prefer to move to adequate accommodations prepared in Grozny for that very purpose rather than continue living in tents in these horrible conditions"

Mr. Issaev, President of the Chechen State Council¹²

In actuality, the authorities' refusal to agree to the construction of new sites for displaced persons in Ingushetia takes the form of repeated prohibitions to access the camps¹³ and in endless administrative roadblocks: in the past months, NGOs have been barred from building, rehabilitating or installing shelters or new tents for evicted families; restrictions,

¹¹ *"The displaced are staying to take advantage of the humanitarian aid in Ingushetia"* Mr. Lebedev, Head of the department of international affairs at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, February 9, 2004, at a meeting with governmental structures on humanitarian aid in Chechnya

¹² Caucasus Time, January 10, 2004

¹³ Access to the camps is increasingly subject to prior written authorization, which sometimes needs to be obtained daily

technical or legal in nature, are constantly raised to push back the beginning of construction, including of sanitary facilities. During the first week of February, 32 tents built by the NGOs in the collective center of Angusht, in the Nazran district, were dismantled. They were ready to receive 150 persons.

C) Chronicle of the Closing of the Official Camps

“For a number of these [humanitarian] organizations, their work permit will expire on April 1, 2004.”

Mr. Badaiev, Vice-prime Minister of Chechnya¹⁴

Planned since 2002, the closing of the official tent camps has been accelerated these past months and should be completed in a few weeks.

In 2002, the Zamenskoye camp (5,000 persons) and the camp in the village of Aki Yurt (1,700 persons) were taken down. The Aki Yurt camp was dismantled quickly and without witnesses, since NGOs and international observers were barred from entering the camp while this was happening.

In 2003, the trend took momentum: pressures started to be exerted, with the goal of lowering below 1,000 the number of displaced persons in each camp. The authorities mentioned on several occasions during coordination meetings with the HCR that it was not financially viable to maintain the logistics of a camp for less than 1,000 persons. This argument allowed them to justify passing decrees ordering the closing of camps upon reaching this figure.

▪ **Before the Chechen presidential elections: closing of the Bella camp in September 2003**

In July 2003, the Bella camp (1,000 persons) was under mounting pressure, and representatives of the Ingush service of migration announced its imminent closing, even though the displaced persons did not want to leave. In August, 200 displaced persons were evicted and moved by force into unfinished shelters outside of the camp, then brought back, by masked and armed men, to Bella, where their tents had in the meantime been taken down. They were housed in unsanitary buildings, and the HCR denounced on that occasion the “aggressive and unacceptable manner in which the displaced persons [in the Bella camp] were treated.”¹⁵

In September, gas, electricity and water services were cut off, and some of the sanitary infrastructures dismantled. The humanitarian workers’ access to the camp suddenly became subject to prior authorization.

¹⁴ Itar Tass, January 10, 2004

¹⁵ Kris Janowski, spokesperson for HCR – press release, August 15, 2003

- **Before the Russian parliamentary elections: closing of the Alina camp in December 2003**

On November 11, the population of the Alina camp officially fell below the threshold of 1,000. The authorities declared the closing of the camp would begin, with a target completion date of December 1st. The head of the camp was then relieved of his functions, the dates for interruption of gas and electricity services were announced, and the displaced persons had 8 days to find a solution...

Power blackouts occurred in Satsita, Sputnik and Alina between November 17 and 23. Again, humanitarian workers were barred from entering the camps during the first week of December.

New tents were built in Satsita, but they needed to be equipped with gas, electricity and water. The authorities refused to pay for the work, and did not allow recycling of the used equipment from the Alina camp.

The displaced persons had to wait in cold weather for four weeks before gas and electricity were finally installed.

In the end, 226 displaced persons went back to Chechnya, 369 were moved to Satsita, and the others found shelter in the collective centers in Ingushetia.

- **Before the Russian presidential elections: March 2004 closings announced for Bart, Sputnik and Satsita**

Although the official population in the Bart camp fell below 1,000 on November 11, 2003, the camp remained open for several months. However, new construction was not allowed and some NGOs were even prevented from maintaining existing infrastructures. Sanitary conditions rapidly deteriorated.

On January 16, the Ingush, Chechen and Russian authorities in Moscow imposed a 10-day ultimatum: if the displaced persons did not leave the camp within that period of time, "measures would be taken" against them¹⁶.

In the meantime, 54 housing units (with a capacity of 270 persons), just built by the NGOs, were available in Kristal, a collective camp in Narzan. The authorities prohibited the continuation of this building program.

In early February 2004, the official closing decree for the Bart camp was issued. 240 persons refused to leave. On February 26, while they were still in the camp, gas was turned off indefinitely. Out of the 48 remaining families, 9 left to look for housing in Ingushetia, and 39 returned to Chechnya.

Bart was officially closed on March 1, 2004. The camp is currently deserted, and the collective buildings have been dismantled.

In early March the last 2 camps, Sputnik and Satsita, housing together over 3,900 displaced persons, were in turn progressively emptying.

From an initial population of over 200,000 displaced persons, there remain less than 70,000 of them in Ingushetia, even as the conflict in Chechnya is lasting and the displaced keep requesting alternatives to their return home.

¹⁶ Prima News Agency, January 16, 2004

D) Conclusion: an exhausted population living in a state of permanent worry, and reaching the end of its resources

The displaced persons do not want to return to Chechnya because they fear for their lives. Some go back nevertheless, because they are exhausted by four years in exile in increasingly difficult conditions. Shifted from one lodging to another depending on their economic hardships and the closing of the official tent camps, concerned by the growing insecurity they encounter within the camps, where controls and night arrests are multiplying, convinced that return aid will only be granted to the first applicants, the displaced families are at the end of their rope, as exemplified by the testimony below, which analyses the evolution of the psychological state of the displaced persons in the Bart camp, from 2000 to its closing in 2004¹⁷.

“The psychological state of the displaced population has evolved during this period. In 2000 and 2001, war traumas were preeminent, whereas in the following years, the majority of traumas were related to life in the camps. While expecting the camp to close, the populations’ psychological state has deteriorated: war events, long forgotten, have resurfaced. An apprehensive anxiety has emerged regarding future changes: displaced persons were anxious about issues such as indemnities, job searches, sending the children back to school.

Before the camp closed, we asked the children two questions during group therapy sessions: “what do you like the most?” and “what do you hate the most?” We had asked the same questions in 2000. The answers to the first question did not change much: “home, Chechnya, the parents”. However, whereas in 2000, the children most hated “war, oil, weapons, planes, tanks, soldiers, to go on foot, dreaming about the war,” in 2004 they mention “war, being a refugee, tents, bad weather, wheat flakes, pasta, drunkards and junkies.” We then asked the following question: “What do you think of the war?” A number of them answered: “I will never forget the war, the war is not over yet”. For those whose parents were killed, the memory of the war is tied to that of their loved ones: “I will never forget the war because it’s impossible to forget when you are being killed”. “I think of my mother and father because were it not for them, we would be dead. My father helped us leave Grozny, and our mother saved us from famine during those horrible days.”

Madina, about 45 years old, 4 children. She lives in Sputnik since the camp opened.

“My husband is very ill; thankfully I receive help with medicines, and he also helps me to go on. We paid a lot of money for him to get surgery in the hospital. Our house was partially destroyed, they won’t indemnify us, but they say they will repair it. I have nowhere to go, I will not leave, no matter what. My husband is terrified of Chechnya. He is even afraid to look towards the Chechen border.

I am a teacher in the camp school. The children have serious memory problems. They cry a lot, one can sense how nervous they are. These pressures, departures, and changes are very painful for them. The fears and anxieties of the parents are transmitted to the children.”

¹⁷ Source: testimony of a psychotherapist having worked on the mental health program set up by Médecins du Monde in the Bart camp from 2000 to 2004

III. Chechnya, back to hell

A) Back to the abnormal for displaced persons returning to Chechnya

- **Permanent insecurity in areas where populations returning from Ingushetia live**

According to the Russian government, and the Chechen government in place since October 2003, the lack of safety in Chechnya is minor and residual: since July 2003, the direction of the Chechen operations is no longer the responsibility of the FSB, but has been moved to the Ministry of the Interior. This change is meant to signal a new stage in the process of normalization of the Chechen situation, and the shift from an anti-terrorist operation to one of securization of the social order.

“Now the situation has completely changed, there are no more large groups in Chechnya”.

July 2003 statement by the head of the FSB.

In the same vein the federal Russian minister responsible for the economic and social reconstruction of Chechnya recently declared¹⁸: *“There no longer is a security issue in Chechnya: all the structures necessary to guarantee the citizens’ security are in place.”*

But in reality, the situation is quite different: though it appears to have somewhat improved (less controls at military checkpoints for instance), 80,000 to 100,000 Russian military troops are still posted on the Chechen territory, for approximately 700,000 inhabitants.

According to the population, abductions of civilians by the various Chechen security services and the Russian military, as well as looting by the military, are the main problems in Chechnya today.

The heads of local administrations (mayors, regional governors) are powerless against these squadrons that arrest civilians, especially at night, and take them to secret locations. Women are also subject to these raids: on January 15, a mother of 4 was arrested in Urus-Martan and taken to an unknown location. She still has not been released. Still in Urus-Martan, on February 25, a 60-year old woman was arrested with her husband.

He was released some time thereafter.

Ruslam, administrator of a large village of 15,000 inhabitants

“The arrests continue, and we don’t know where people are taken, or who takes them. In early January, military personnel traveling in unmarked vehicles arrested several men. There still are special operations, but they no longer are

¹⁸ S. Ilyanov Moscow, February 9, 2004 – meeting with governmental structures one humanitarian aid in Chechnya

as massive as they were until 2002. They are more targeted. In most cases they are led jointly by the Russians and the Chechens.

In the village, 23 persons have disappeared since the beginning of the war. In 2001, 2002, there were terrible mop-up operations in the village. The military prosecutor and the regional attorney general opened cases, but nothing happened, nothing is really done to find these people. Not one abduction or looting case has been resolved.

In the course of special operations, no one comes to see us, even though there is a decree according to which we are supposed to be forewarned.

As representatives of the local administration, there is nothing we can do. Often, after violent acts, kidnappings, lootings, the representatives of the attorney general's office come and take note of the event, and they leave. That's all.

We are in contact with the military, but that doesn't mean we have information.

During special operations, the local militia cannot do anything,

The worst for the people and us is the unknown, not knowing if we'll have a quiet night. What is important for us in the case of an arrest [abduction] is to know who kidnapped the person and where she was taken. We never get that information, even though the administrative head can get to [the village entrance, where the Russian troops and the various services' representatives are posted]. Each time he goes there for a specific reason, in particular because someone was arrested, they tell him they don't know anything and this person isn't there.

When someone has been abducted [arrested], there is nothing we can do to help him. Of course we feel powerless. We have relations with the FSB. Sometimes even they don't know who arrested these people and where they were taken. They look for them.

Any battalion can enter your house at anytime and arrest you. If Kadyrov himself cannot do anything, what can the administrator of a village do?"

In the PVRs (Punkt Vremenogo Projivania: temporary shelters) where a portion of the populations returning from Ingushetia is placed, raids by armed men frequently take place:

A woman and her son in a PVR in Grozny

The son: "There have been three raids in this PVR. Once it was the Russians, once the Chechen FSB, and once the Chechen GRU (military intelligence service). The last time was on December 8, 2003. They wore masks, and they took pleasure in humiliating us. They made the men lie down on the ground, even an elderly man whom they hit because he couldn't lie down; they "helped him out". The PVR guards were also subject to their humiliations and had to lie down".

The woman: "A soldier hit my 15-year-old daughter in the back of her neck with his weapon. They stayed for 1 ½ hour in total".

The son: "They came to "check passports". They did check a few, broke down some locked doors. Clearly they were looking for someone, but mainly they took this opportunity to humiliate us."

▪ **Empty promises and difficult survival day-to-day**

Today, about 28 PVRs or temporary shelters are open in Chechnya. They accommodate approximately 30,000 persons. Two new shelters are slated to open in

Atchkhoj-Martan, and in Leninskij Rajon in Grozny. Some returning families were also offered to reside in people's homes in Chechnya, in exchange for an indemnity equivalent to three months' rent.

In order to increase the capacity of these often-overcrowded shelters, the authorities deliver a certificate (uvedomlenie) to persons wishing to opt for this payment: this certificate is no guarantee that the payment will be received¹⁹, though it does obligate the persons who obtain it to vacate the shelter:

Anna, who arrived in August 2003 from the Alina camp in the Tchaikovskaja PVR in Grozny

"In January, when we applied for the indemnity, the workers from the Russian federation migration services commission, who came around to provide some help, told us that in order to apply, we had to sign a document whereby when we receive the certificate (uvedomlenie) for the indemnity, we will vacate the room. We sent the application in January and received the uvedomlenie in February 2004. When we received it, the PVR commander came by and told me that we had to free the room, otherwise he would sue us. Three other families are in the same situation. They also told us that if we stayed, we would have to pay rent. Now we are afraid, because everyone knows that we received this uvedomlenie. There are even rumors in the PVR that I received the money. I will not leave this place until I receive my money. I have nowhere to go."

Amnat

"I received the uvedomlenie for my indemnity on January 26, 2004. The PVR commander asked me to leave. But I don't want to complain about him, because I work here as a cleaning lady. I am afraid, because everybody here knows that I received this uvedomlenie. Yesterday, Russians from the Ministry of Social Affairs came with soldiers. They told me I had to vacate the room. They showed me the letter I signed obligating me to free the room when I receive the uvedomlenie. They said they would strike me from the lists of beneficiaries of humanitarian aid."

The living conditions in these PVRs are usually precarious; job opportunities are scarce for these families who live in close quarters; access to healthcare and education is very limited. Unemployment benefits (600 rubles, or about 20 euros) are insufficient to cover the needs of a family.

Madina, who arrived in the Tchaikovskaja PVR from the Alina camp in August 2003. She lives with her family of nine in 20 square meters (200sqft)

"I agreed to leave the camp in Ingushetia and to come here, because they promised me that we would receive some indemnities and that we would get two bedrooms for our large family. We used to live in Grozny. Our apartment was completely destroyed. My husband works illegally, he renovates houses and apartments. Here, there are

¹⁹ Families are generally able to receive them only if they bribe the administration, for up to 50% of the amount due

bathrooms, thankfully, although one needs to get the water from outside. No one is helping us. The Ministry of Social Affairs only gives us some bread (...). If one compares the current situation with how things were in Ingushetia, we were doing quite well in Ingushetia. I am sorry I came back to Chechnya.”

Raissa

“We came in October 2003, from Karaboulak. There are seven of us, and they gave us this room. I sent my children to stay with relatives, for two reasons: first because there is very little space here, but mostly because of school. Here there is no school nearby. The closest school is on the other side of the road. The authorities had promised us that a school would be built for the children staying in the PVR, but like everything else it never went beyond that stage.”

Katarina, who came from the Bart camp

“Life is difficult here, all in one room, with no bathroom. We’re very tense. In four months we received food only once, mostly corned beef. Before, in Ingushetia, we received groceries from the Ministry of Social Affairs, from [the NGOs]. Here, nothing. (...)

We are seven living in one room, which is a problem: it’s not our mentality. We get sick more than we did in Ingushetia.

If they gave us what we used to receive in Ingushetia, and indemnities for our destroyed houses, we wouldn’t complain. There is no work; it is very difficult to find a job. If there was work, we would be working, we’re not afraid of that. Either we are offered jobs with very low salaries, or we have to pay to obtain a job.

In any event, we came here. We cannot go back. But if we had work and the NGOs helped us, we could live like human beings.

We live mostly thanks to our families.

What can we do? Life goes on, we have to live.”

Elmira, who came from the Satsita camp and has been living for 4 months in the PVR on Doudaev Boulevard in Grozny

“One has to pay if one needs to go to the hospital: to get a consultation, for medicines, for tests. In addition, one has to bring the equipment (gloves, tubes etc)

I was given a prescription to go see a gynecologist. I couldn’t get in anywhere because I couldn’t pay.

My 13-year-old daughter is the size and weight of a 9-year-old child. But I have no money for her healthcare.”

B) Chechnya, symptoms and effects of an endless war

Beyond the tragedy of the Chechen displaced persons forced to return, hundreds of thousands of Chechens suffer daily from the consequences of an internal war, as exemplified by the following events.

- **Survival is a daily challenge for civilian populations in the mountains of Chechnya**

With a presence in the Southern mountains of Chechnya since 1999, Action contre la Faim has conducted several surveys on the populations' food security situation. These surveys expose the permanence of war and its impact on the daily life of the people.

About a third of the residential housing has been completely destroyed, and two-thirds have been partially destroyed²⁰.

Several thousand soldiers are still posted in Shatoi, Sharoi and Itum Kale. In each large village there is a military command post. The troops are reinforced by the border patrols, which maintain their positions along the Georgian border, as well as by official forces such as the police forces of the Ministry of the Interior, the FSB and other security services.

Artillery and air raids started being used again in 2003, sporadically at first, then more systematically at the beginning of 2004. Targeting wooded areas, these bombings sometimes reach residential areas and terrorize the population. Raids by masked and armed men are frequent in villages, and are occasionally followed by murders, as was the case in October 2003 in Bugaroy and Ulus Kert, in the Itum Kale district. There continues to be ambushes against military convoys, attacks against police stations, confrontations between federal forces and Chechen fighters followed by federal counter-attacks (mop-up operations, civilian arrests).

39% of the surveyed families who live in these areas²¹ are missing at least one member who was killed or disappeared since the beginning of the second war.

The central hospital of the Shatoi district is the referring hospital for the whole region. Russian military personnel have been occupying it since the beginning of the conflict and the military command is still based in the building. After a temporary move to a village house, the hospital is now set up in a village further away. The physician on duty is the only one for the three districts.

Since the beginning of 2003, the State started rebuilding some of the structures, such as administrative and military buildings. In each district, there is now a public telephone line. However, there is no public water distribution network in the region. The water comes from natural sources. The distance to water access points varies from about 10 meters to one kilometer (2/3 of a mile).

From a practical standpoint, the population uses mostly wood for its heating and cooking needs. Villagers are required to obtain an authorization from the Forestry Department, which must then be validated by the local military command, in order to collect wood in certain areas considered to be dangerous (due to landmines and fighting). Therefore, most families would rather buy the wood, even if that uses up a large portion of the family budget (1,500 to 3,500 rubles for 1 to 1 ½ months).

²⁰ Source: Local administration. The data should only be viewed as an indication, as the criteria have not been standardized.

²¹ Out of 160 families interviewed from September to December 2003. Food security survey: *"Populations affected by the war in the districts of Shatoi, Sharoi, Itum Kale and the villages of Chiski and Dachu- Borzoi, Chechnya"* – Action contre la Faim (France).

Action contre la Faim estimates that the mountain populations have lost on average 80% of their herds as a result of the war (looting, landmines, death of cattle by starvation, sale or consumption of the cattle to deal with a crisis etc.)

Traditionally based on a collective and planned agricultural production, the family economy has had to integrate a war economy: menial jobs (construction, retail) have sprung up around military bases; the cost of transportation, and therefore of basic staples on markets, has increased across the board, in particular owing to the roadblocks, fixed or moving, where tolls are required to be paid.

In order to adapt to an increasingly isolated economy, and to a progressively more limited agricultural production, families have had to resort to using their own capital (over 40% of the population's revenues comes from loans, sales of personal assets and outside aid) to obtain money, now a vital source of access to food.

Unable to reconstitute their herd or seed stock, unable to physically gain access to land strewn with landmines, most families do not even want to, as they fear further destruction or confiscations. The shortage of active workers (less than 40% of families have one member who is working), caused by human losses during this war, is also an important factor in this lack of motivation.

▪ **The war is continuing, as evidenced by the medical statistics**

The hospital support program led by Médecins du Monde in Chechnya gives them access to meaningful data regarding the health of Chechen civilian populations.

The analysis of the types of surgical procedures performed shows that the situation is still abnormal: war-related wounds and traumas are still extensive, despite statements that the situation has moved toward peace and normalization. In addition, the epidemiology reports should be put in perspective, since most war casualties, for reasons of security, are registered as accident victims.

For instance, in hospital #9 in Grozny, which is the referring hospital for all of Chechnya (since it performs 6,000 surgeries with general anesthesia each year, which represents about 45% of the total surgical activity in hospitals in Chechnya), the following figures were observed:

	Number of war casualties	Death rate (number of hospital deaths caused by war wounds)
2001	929	49%
2002	862	53%
2003	543	59%

In sum, although the share of traumas related to the war has shrunk, the lethality of these traumas has increased, even as the care provided in the hospital has improved thanks to continuing humanitarian support (periodic donations of medicines and hospital equipment, refurbishment of the premises, improvement of asepsis).

The proportion of traumas related to mines or explosive devices is still high in surgery department (7 to 12%), and peaks during the summer, when people work in the fields. The federal military forces have not undertaken any serious demining of fields and forests.

The share of war surgeries has slightly decreased since 2001-2002 to an average of 10 to 20% depending on the hospitals. This figure nevertheless confirms that war operations that directly affect the civilian populations (wounds from artillery, explosive devices and landmines) are still being pursued, contrary to the authorities' assertions that Chechnya is now peaceful.

A large number of pathologies have obvious psychogenic causes²² (various functional troubles). Indeed, the permanent war atmosphere and the recurring "mop-up" operations led by the Russian army and the pro-Russian Chechen forces maintain stress and terror. This would explain the constant rise of psycho-traumatic and depressive syndromes.

Finally, the medical teams of Médecins du Monde note the large percentage of children suffering from clinical anemia, and of pathologies related to hygiene issues. Families face enormous transportation hurdles to obtain groceries, and nutritional deficiencies are therefore unavoidable. Water and water treatment infrastructures, already badly damaged by war, continue to deteriorate.

▪ **...and by the incessant constraints on surgical care**

Through the joint effort of the medical NGOs, Chechen hospitals can deal with emergencies and provide pre-, per and post surgical care in a relatively satisfactory manner. However, a serious issue remains: the supply of anesthetics, without which it is impossible to operate on patients. In Russia, these products are part of a list of "narcotic drugs" subject to strict controls: a special license is necessary to import them, to purchase them, to transport them or to prescribe them. The NGOs, the Chechen Ministry of Health and the hospitals are deprived of these drugs as a result of a unilateral decision of the Russian federal authorities. Consequently, the anesthesiologists or the patients themselves have to acquire the anesthetics on the black market (in the bazaar), which is of course illegal. In addition, the quality of the products is unknown, which creates an additional risk for the patients.

The Russian police often raid hospitals to search for these anesthetics. Anesthesiologists are frequently interrogated on the presence of the drugs, which can only be illegal, since there is no other way to obtain them, even though other hospitals can have access to them.

Médecins du Monde estimates that this constraint causes several deaths each month:

"On February 7, 2004, a patient injured in a car accident was transported in emergency to the Urus-Martan hospital, to be operated on. That day, the anesthesiologist on duty could not obtain any ketamine, an oft-used anesthetic in Chechnya (there was none left on the black market). Therefore, the doctors had to carry the patient to hospital #9. He died of internal hemorrhage during the trip."

This is in effect a case of criminalization of a medical act resulting in an obstacle to healthcare, which worsens the human toll caused by the war.

²² Information gathered in the course of Médecins du Monde's regular activities providing basic healthcare in Chechnya in three health centers (two in Grozny and one in Argun)

- **Landmines in Chechnya, or the stigmata from the war**

Handicap International has had a presence with the Chechen population in Ingushetia and Chechnya since March 2000. The organization's activities, directed at helping disabled persons, including numerous war casualties, allow it to testify on the effects of the conflict and the damages caused by landmines.

Olara Utunu, special representative of the United Nations, estimated in June 2002, during his trip to Russia, that Chechnya was "one of the areas the most polluted by landmines on the planet". Despite the international implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty (the Ottawa treaty, which Russia still refuses to ratify), the various parties involved in the conflict in Chechnya continue to use this type of weapon. An exact estimate of the location and number of mines remains difficult due to the permanent evolution of the front lines and to other factors (such as manipulation and moving of devices by military personnel and civilians, seasonal floods, agricultural work, sporadic demining operations...) The source of most of the data provided below is the Landmines Observatory Report, which compiles results obtained by independent researchers and information from various sources.

Use by the Russian forces: Russia admits that its forces used landmines in Chechnya between 1997 and 2003. The Russian army continues to mine the areas bordering its military positions, checkpoints, as well as the numerous areas it views as "suspicious," with the only goal to limit population movements. In July 2002, a Chechen official estimates that the Russians had laid approximately 3 million landmines during the second Chechen war.

In 1999 and 2000, the Russian forces spread anti-personnel landmines from helicopters, planes and missiles, creating as a result vast mined areas with very vague perimeters. The districts most affected by this "blind" mining method are those of Shelkovskaja, Nozhai Yourt, Vedeno, and the Urus-Martan district hills. In this latter district, a Chechen NGO counted 43 landmine casualties in two villages (Martanchu and Tangichu). There is currently no demining operation in this area.

According to a report given to the media, the engineering service of the North Caucasus military district has laid 123 minefields in Grozny in 1999 and 2000 (119 anti-personnel minefields, 2 anti-tank minefields, and 2 dual minefields), which caused 592 casualties in the past three years. However, Russian officials continue to insist that the landmines are only used in accordance with the terms of protocol II of the 1980 Treaty on Certain Conventional Weapons: they assert that all the minefields are delimited and marked out to avoid civilian casualties, and that once the military operations are completed, the mines will be removed. There is no past or current testimony corroborating these allegations.

Use by Chechen forces: Chechen rebels also continue to use landmines, almost daily, against Russian and civilian targets, though there is less evidence to back up these facts. They may be using civilian, including children, to lay down mines and other explosive devices directed against Russian targets. Some civilians would be remunerated according to the impact of the blast. In some cases, the rebels may be using threats and blackmail to secure their cooperation.

There were approximately 1,300 incidents caused by mines involving federal Russian forces in Chechnya from 1999 to March 2003, and approximately 2,500 casualties in the Russian military.

Reliable figures for civilian mine casualties are extremely difficult to obtain. Realistic orders of magnitude are several hundred dead and several thousand wounded since 1999. Unicef's database reports 2,281 known victims since the beginning of the conflict, 464 of which died and 1,817 of which were wounded. Almost half of the wounded were amputated. The majority of the victims are between 15 and 29 years old.

No humanitarian demining operation has been undertaken in Chechnya since the English NGO Halo Trust ceased its operations in 1999. The chaotic military situation and the severe risks to which humanitarian workers would be exposed prevent a resumption of these activities.

The Russian forces are undertaking a few operations of military demining, that is with the sole objective to facilitate the movement of troops. In May 2003, a military spokesperson estimated that about 100 explosive devices were disarmed each week. In any event, this figure is insignificant compared to the magnitude of the issue.

▪ **Extreme vulnerability of handicapped persons**

There are thousands of persons wounded by mines, firings, bombings or violent treatments. According to official statistics, there are 36,181 handicapped persons, including 8,982 children, regardless of the cause of their handicap. However, these figures only take into account individuals who applied to be registered, and as a result they are far short of the real numbers. Numerous handicapped persons report having to pay the civil servants in charge of reviewing their file in order to be registered and thus obtain a small pension.

The forced political process begun in 2003 envisioned large amounts of federal financing, in order to improve the economic and social situation in Chechnya. Therefore, the current government has, in theory, the means to provide support to vulnerable populations and in particular to handicapped persons. It is abundantly clear, however, that these resources are not reaching their intended beneficiaries.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs explains that the 34 million rubles (\$1.1 million) annual budget for disabled persons is largely insufficient. "Subsidies exist to buy coal for region that have no gas, and to buy prostheses, but there are no funds for wheelchairs and accommodations in sanatoriums."

In medical and social governmental institutions, salaries are generally paid, but equipment and food is usually supplied through international aid. The shortage of medical services and of services of physical rehabilitation greatly increases the risk that minor injuries become permanent handicaps.

Handicapped persons are dramatically marginalized by society. They often view themselves as useless burdens for their kin and for society. Young people with a handicap or who have been amputated are suspected by the police of being former fighters, and suffer from violence or bullying.

Adam

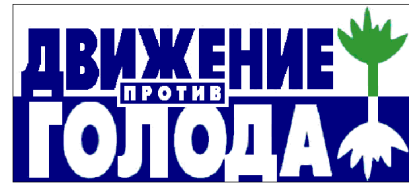
"It happened in May 2002. I woke up early that morning to go to the market. Outside, I saw one of my neighbors running towards me, yelling that all the roads were blocked, and that the soldiers were about to engage in a "mop up" operation in our village. Since I have never belonged to any group, I wasn't concerned. I had never found myself at the center of these "mop ups," I had no idea how they took place; I imagined they were simply an ID verification. I was completely wrong.

A large number of federal forces barged into our courtyard. Without asking me any question, they pulled a bag over my head and dragged me onto the BTR (armed vehicle). My father ran over to help me; they hit him on the head. I could hear him implore, scream, but he could only watch as the BTR took me away to an unknown destination. Thankfully my mother had left us two days earlier, because I don't think she could have taken this scene... Inside the truck, I heard the soldiers speak about me. One of them suggested to throw me out of the vehicle, to avoid troubles. I did not have a chance to react: in a matter of seconds, I was thrown out; I felt an excruciating pain and fainted. I came to in the hospital, after the surgery. I had a very hard time getting used to the idea that I will never walk again.

It is horrible, I am a father of two, but I am unable to give my children anything. Instead of protecting them, I have become a burden for them. It would be less frustrating if I knew I was guilty, but what happened to me has nothing to do with me. And how many are like me?"

Exhibits

Reminder of Activities in the region



Action contre la Faim is a non-governmental, non-religious organization founded in 1979. Action contre la Faim leads humanitarian programs addressing the needs of distressed populations in crisis and post-crisis situations. Through its international network, it sets up emergency and follow-up programs in approximately 40 countries in the fields of nutrition, food safety, water and health. Each year, the organization assists over 5 million people.

Action contre la Faim first intervened with Chechen populations during the first war in Chechnya (1994-1996).

As early as December 1995, Action contre la Faim led food and agricultural input distributions programs for displaced and homeless persons victims of fighting, as well as programs of nutritional assistance for institutions and shelters for displaced persons, in Chechnya, in Ingushetia and in northern Ossetia. Action contre la Faim withdrew from the region at the end of 1997.

After the conflict between the Russian army and the Chechen fighters resumed in the fall of 1999, Action contre la Faim reopened a mission to help the 200,000 or so displaced persons who found shelter in Ingushetia.

Today, Action contre la Faim in Chechnya provides food aid to populations in the Southern mountains (15,000 persons), and brings selective support (rehabilitation, food aid) to social and medical institutions.

In Ingushetia, Action contre la Faim helps displaced families by distributing formula to 6- to 24- months old infants. Action contre la Faim is also conducting a program of rehabilitation of water and water treatment infrastructures in the sites in Ingushetia where displaced persons are accommodated.



Médecins du Monde is an international solidarity organization that has relied for over 20 years on the commitment of its members (healthcare professionals) to assist the most vulnerable populations in the world and in France.

Médecins du Monde has a permanent presence in the region since 1995. In 1998 and 1999, the expatriates withdrew for safety reasons, but the organization continued to manage the mission from Moscow. Actions first focused on basic healthcare; then, in 1996, MdM set up mental health programs.

- **In Ingushetia:**

Since the closing of the “Bart” camp, the program providing basic healthcare and psychological support for the Chechen displaced persons in Ingushetia has been directed to the “Sputnik” camp and is three-pronged:

- basic healthcare via consultations in a dispensary
- mental healthcare (one-on-one consultations, or group sessions, especially for women and children)
- follow-up on human rights, through the periodic posting of observers having the task of surveying displaced persons.

- **In Chechnya:**

The MdM program in Chechnya provides support to health structures and is geared to improving the care of casualties (safety pre-, per, and post-surgery). It is comprised of three segments:

- basic healthcare (consultations given in 2 health centers in Grozny and one in Argon)
- supply of equipment, heavy reanimation and post surgical care equipment, and surgical perishables
- follow-up on human rights, through the periodic posting of observers having the task of surveying healthcare professionals, casualties and displaced persons inside Chechnya.

In the next few months, MdM hopes to become responsible for the primary healthcare of some mountainous regions in the South-East of Chechnya, where acts of war are particularly frequent, resulting in numerous civilian casualties.



Handicap International was founded in 1982, and intervenes in favor of disabled persons in 60 countries. The organization launched its actions for the Chechen population in March 2000, when it sent wheelchairs and walking aids (canes, crutches and walkers) to Ingushetia and Chechnya to address emergency needs. In the spring of 2001, two offices were opened in the region, in Nazran and in Grozny.

To improve and broaden the assistance to handicapped persons, Handicap International opted to focus its action on a few key sectors that have a rapid impact on the most vulnerable portion of the disabled population.

- **Equipment and Care**

In 2003, thanks to Handicap International's actions, 1,300 handicapped persons received equipment improving their mobility and/or hygienic kits adapted to their needs. Sixty persons received prostheses. Three physical therapy centers were opened (Grozny, Argon, and Urus-Martan).

- **Supplies and training**

Seven trauma services received various types of specialized medical equipment. The medical school in Grozny resumed its classes of physical therapy for nurses. Seventy workers, from hospitals, physical therapy centers, or local organizations, received specialized training in physical rehabilitation.

- **Economic and social integration of disabled persons**

An apparel production workshop was created for handicapped persons in Achkoi Martan. Three local organizations for the disabled received support in the form of equipment donations and specialized training. Finally, various programs aimed at raising awareness to the plight of handicapped persons were created and disseminated in Chechnya.

Contacts

Action contre la Faim (France)

4 rue Niepce – 75014 Paris

Tel. 01 43 35 88 88

<http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org>

Handicap International

14, Av. Berthelot – 69361 Lyon Cedex

Tel. 04 78 69 79 79

www.handicap-international.org

Médecins du Monde

62 rue Marcadet – 75018 Paris

Tel. 01 44 92 15 15

www.medecinsdumonde.org