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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sixtieth session

Item 11 of the provisional agenda

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Written statement\* submitted by the World Organization against  
Torture,  
the International Federation of ACAT (Action by Christians for the  
Abolition of  
Torture), le Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement  
(CCFD),  
non-governmental organizations in special consultative status and  
Médecins du  
Monde-International, a non-governmental organization in general  
consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement  
which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council  
resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2004]

OMCT, FIACAT, Médecins du Monde, le Comité Catholique Contre la  
Faim et pour le Développement (in consultative status with ECOSOC),  
and Secours Catholique / Caritas France, are gravely concerned about  
the continuing conflict in Chechnya. Over the past decade, the republic

of Chechnya has suffered through two wars, both of which were characterised by severe human rights violations perpetrated by Russian armed forces as well as Chechen rebel groups. These abuses continue in the present day. Reports of torture, disappearances, summary executions, rape, forced evictions, and other forms of ill treatment perpetrated by the Russian armed forces are common news in the Chechen Republic. The city of Grozny remains in ruins, with no effort having been made to reconstruct hospitals, apartment buildings, schools, or other fundamental structures.

There is an enormous amount of documentation attesting to the widespread nature of torture in Chechnya, but at the same time, many stories have not been heard because the victims of torture are also frequently disappeared. The dead bodies of persons who have been detained frequently show traces of torture. Common forms of torture include severe beatings, extensive use of electro-shock, including electro-shock to the genitals, and mutilation such as cutting off the victim's ear. Victims of torture, like all residents of Chechnya, are afraid to go to the hospital for treatment because of frequent military searches of hospitals.

In the face of the horrors faced by Chechen people on a daily basis, the Russian government has been claiming that the situation in Chechnya is "normalised." In March 2003, a constitutional referendum was organised, which approved a constitution establishing Chechnya as an autonomous Republic within the Russian Federation. However, the legitimacy of the referendum has been seriously doubted. Although violence perpetrated by Russian state agents appeared to decrease immediately before the referendum, once the vote had taken place, the Russian armed forces and other state agents committed human rights abuses with renewed force.

Additionally, in October 2003, a presidential poll was held and many doubts were expressed about its legitimacy as many of the serious opposition candidates were forced out of the race a month before. There were no international election monitors present for the presidential poll, the OSCE and the Council of Europe having refused to send such observers. Local observers of the elections witnessed an extremely low turn out of voters, and the results of the election do not appear to reflect the voice of people. The Chechen people continue to live in fear and fiercely dispute claims of normality, as the pro-Russian Chechen

government perpetrate human rights violations on a daily basis. Also, since the beginning of 2003, human rights violations have increasingly been committed in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, both in IDP camps as well as the private sphere. Federal forces and local agents harass and intimidate IDPs in tent camps in order to close those camps and to force them to return to Chechnya, where the war is still going on.

Access to justice is also a severe problem in Chechnya for victims of human rights abuses or their family members. The justice system in Chechnya is plagued by corruption, long arduous procedures, jurisdictional issues as well as frequent threats against complainants. In the few instances where complaints have been successfully brought before the courts, military personnel who have committed grave human rights abuses reportedly receive minimum punishment, if they are punished at all. These obstacles often prevent victims from receiving adequate redress and reparation for the abuse they have suffered and perpetuate the system of impunity throughout Chechnya.

With regard to Chechnya, we would like to urge the Commission to:

- Adopt a resolution on the Russian Federation, challenging claims of normalisation of the Chechen situation by the Russian government, calling on the Russian government to put an end to torture and other human rights abuses, which occur on a regular basis, and to immediately cease the forcible return of Chechen IDPs from Ingushetia to Chechnya;
- Adopt a resolution appointing a Special Rapporteur on human rights in Chechnya;
- Strongly urge the Russian Federation to ensure that all victims of human rights abuses have access to relevant judicial procedures and are provided with adequate compensation; and
- Call upon the Russian government to re-open the frontiers of Chechnya to international observers to ensure adequate monitoring of human rights observance on the territory of Chechnya and issue a standing invitation to all human rights mechanisms of the UN Commission on Human Rights, in order that they might visit Chechnya and report on the human rights situation there.

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).