



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell

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Chairman - Helsinki Commission

The ongoing war in Chechnya, the second in the past ten years, has resulted in the most egregious human rights violations in the OSCE region today. Hundreds of thousands of persons have been forced to leave their homes and settle in refugee camps or find shelter wherever they can. The capital city of Grozny has been bombed to the point where World War II veterans compare it to Stalingrad. Hundreds of individuals in Chechnya have been killed, or have disappeared into so-called "filtration camps" from which they emerge beaten and tortured, or not at all. Others cling to the wreckage of their homes as they struggle for their very existence daily. Russian soldiers die in fewer numbers, but their deaths are no less sorrowful to parents and loved ones.

The recently released State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices documents a pattern of clear, gross and uncorrected violations of basic human rights in Chechnya. While there appear to be credible linkages between some elements of the Chechen insurgency and outside terrorists groups, this does not diminish the responsibility of the Russian authorities to uphold the rights of civilians in Chechnya -- those who have by far borne the brunt of the Russian military campaign to root out separatists in the region.

The failure of the Russian leadership to investigate and hold members of the military and other responsible for gross human rights violations in Chechnya accountable for their crimes is particularly disturbing.

Two and a half years after the Istanbul OSCE summit, the Russian Federation has yet to earnestly pursue a political solution to the conflict in Chechnya. Left to fester further, the Chechen war will only lead to more hardship and suffering for the people of the region. As Secretary Powell concluded at the Bucharest OSCE Ministerial in December, "Peace in this region will not only end a bloody conflict, it would deny political cover to terrorists in Chechnya."

As President Bush prepares to hold his first summit in Russia later this month, I urge him to raise developments in Chechnya with President Putin, urging the Russian leader to pursue a path that will bring peace to that war torn part of Russia.

