

The Status of Chechnya



October 10, 1998

Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

WASHINGTON : 1998

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

234 Ford House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515-6460

(202) 225-1901

csce@mail.house.gov

<http://www.csce.gov>

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH COMMISSIONERS

HOUSE

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey,
Chairman

FRANK R. WOLF, Virginia

MATT SALMON, Arizona

MICHAEL P. FORBES, New York

JAMES C. GREENWOOD, Pennsylvania

STENY H. HOYER, Maryland

EDWARD J. MARKEY, Massachusetts

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, Maryland

LOUISE McINTOSH SLAUGHTER, New York

SENATE

BEN NIGHTHORSE CAMPBELL, Colorado,
Co-Chairman

SPENCER ABRAHAM, Michigan

KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON, Texas

SAM BROWNBACK, Kansas

Vacant

FRANK R. LAUTENBERG, New Jersey

HARRY REID, Nevada

BOB GRAHAM, Florida

RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD, Wisconsin

EXECUTIVE BRANCH COMMISSIONERS

Harold Hongju Koh, Department of State

(VACANT), Department of Defense

(VACANT), Department of Commerce

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 55 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys more than 20 missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

BRIEFING ON THE STATUS OF CHECHNYA

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1998

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC.

The briefing convened in room 2337, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC., at 2:00 p.m., Dorothy Douglas Taft, Deputy Chief of Staff, presiding.

Ms. TAFT. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and our distinguished guests. We appreciate your being with us this afternoon. My name is Dorothy Taft and I am the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Helsinki Commission. On behalf of Chairman D'Amato and Co-Chairman Christopher Smith, I would like to welcome you to today's briefing by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Our briefing today is on Chechnya, particularly with respect to the development of Islamic education in society, compatible with democratic values and the respect for human rights.

The Commission is mandated by law to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and the subsequent documents of the OSCE. This is one in a series of hearings and briefings that the Commission has conducted with respect to the situation in Chechnya.

Our guests today are Mr. Bisultanov, a Chechen writer and poet, and Ms. Bagalova, a distinguished Chechen actress whose visit is being sponsored by the Sakharov Foundation. They have been visiting the United States and we are honored to have them here with us today on Capitol Hill. Our guests will open with a statement, and then we will open the floor to comments and questions for our distinguished panel.

Again, I want to welcome you all here today. Thank you very much for coming out on a Friday afternoon. It is a very busy day here on Capitol Hill, but I know that the briefing will promise to be worth your time to be here.

We welcome our guests.

Mr. BISULTANOV. First, I want to say that we are happy to be here in the United States. We are glad to have this opportunity and we are grateful to everyone who has come here today and who has been sufficiently interested in the problems of Chechnya to sacrifice time from their busy schedules.

I will leave for now a history of Chechens' problems—a history of conflict and of war—and instead go directly to the subject of today's meeting. If you have any questions related to the history, I gladly will answer them later.

Today in Chechnya, we can say that what has taken place is a humanitarian catastrophe, a social catastrophe, and especially a cultural tragedy, regarding culture, education, and the arts. I can responsibly state to you that today even as we speak, there is not one school in Chechnya that can be considered functional on even an elementary level.

As an example, I can talk about the most prestigious school in the republic, School 41,

Lyceum, in Groznyy. At that school, considered the best, the lessons have been reduced from 45 minutes to 20 minutes because there is no heat. Teachers are unable to present the subjects. In general, I should say that there have been no subsidies, no investments in the education and schools in Chechnya for 7 years.

We can say with confidence that today in Chechnya there are tens of thousands of children deprived of basic fundamental rights regarding education. To be more specific, I will give you some examples of the kind of damage suffered by the educational and cultural activities in Chechnya.

The Chechen state university is completely destroyed, burned down to the ground. All its buildings and all its facilities—the pedagogical institution; the Groznyy Oil Institute; the Republican Academy of Sciences is destroyed, with all its archives; the Institute of Scientific Research; the Center for Folklore Studies; the State Archives of Chechnya are completely destroyed, including all the documents.

Completely destroyed is the joint national museum which has combined the state arts gallery and the ethnographic museum of Chechnya history. That included all the materials that Chechen people were able to collect and restore after the 1944 exile of the Chechen people. Everything restored or collected since then is gone.

We can, today, in this situation of the breakdown of infrastructure, the breakdown of the cultural institutions, the general syndrome of the postwar society shocked by the suffering that Chechnya has been through, thus describe the situation as it exists today.

In addition to that, there is a continuation of economic and cultural blockage of Chechnya, with disinformation being fed into Chechnya. Most people in the world, 99 percent of the people in the world, are not interested to know how the Chechen people really live and what their aspirations are. Some isolated cases of terrorism are presented by mass media as examples and depiction of Chechen culture and society.

The fact is that Chechnya is outside the economic and cultural sphere of Russia since 1991, yet in the eyes of the international community it remains part of it. Presently when our organization is having an event or I have a conversation with some ordinary Chechen people, and I try to talk about democratic values and human rights, what I am met with is a question, where do we receive those human rights. What have I, as an ordinary Chechen, have ever seen done about using those rights? Who had ever granted us any rights? I have no real answers to these questions.

We're a non-governmental organization with the sphere of our work in the culture and art, the name of our organization is LAM (Mountain Top). From the first days that our organization was established, we have received much help from The Andrei Sakharov Foundation. It is a very compelling example of a direct cooperation between the people despite all the difficulties of official contacts or the conflict that exists between Russia and Chechnya. We have received overt help from Moscow-based organization that has been helpful from the very first day.

Our organization has united the creative intelligentsia of Chechnya—the writers, poets, artists, authors, teachers, scientists, the creative part of Chechen society. We are striving to create the base for a civil society in Chechnya using as our tools the culture, the traditional Chechen values as well as the modern secular values of democratic societies.

We have had many very interesting, very substantial meetings with different non-governmental organizations and universities in New York, Atlanta, and Los Angeles. This trip was extremely interesting and educational for us. Now we are in Washington since the day before yesterday and have had many meetings here also. This trip was sponsored

by The Andrei Sakharov Foundation and we have been helped all the way by the president of The Andrei Sakharov Foundation, Mr. Edward Kline.

I would like to mention that in America I am pleasantly surprised every day, even astonished that I am not stopped on every corner by a policeman who wants to check my identity because of my Caucasian nationality. Rerikh^[footnote]* has said that even the prisons must be beautified in order for society to improve. We hope that we will work toward that.

*Nicolai Rerikh—Russian painter and writer, orientlist, died in India (1874-1947).

Thank you very much.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you.

Madam Bagalova.

Ms. BAGALOVA. I can see that people are tired a little bit so we are ready to start an exchange of questions and answers.

Ms. TAFT. Can I open it up? Could you identify yourself and do you mind, unfortunately, we do not have a floor microphone—No, we're transcribing it. So—

QUESTIONER. Lydia Voronina, USIA. I will first ask a question in Russian and then we will translate.

I asked how numerous the organization is, where it is located, and how popular the idea of human rights are in Chechnya now compared with the Mussolini ideology.

Mr. BISULTANOV. The counsel of our organization has 32 members who are the most active members of the Chechen creative intelligentsia. We do not really strive for—to be a mass organization. We are not a political party and do not have membership. We are in contact with practically all intelligentsia in Chechnya.—Also, we maintain many contacts with Chechnya's youth. Twice a month we have access to broadcasting—to broadcast both on the radio and on Chechnya television.

We are trying to influence the society by our ideas, presented through our events, through our communications. In a very traditional Chechen society, I can say that we had an example of that success in creating a society in which there was a practical absence of apparatus of violence of state against individuals. It was a unique society even among the Caucasian states or societies in the sense that it was completely self-governed. Every part of a society was completely self-governed. There was never any central authority or prince, or king in Chechnya, or anything like that.

That was the main reason feudal Russia, in the 19th century, with its system of serfdom, met such resistance in Chechnya. In the traditional Chechen society the values of personal dignity and the responsibility of the individual are considered the greatest virtues, the highest values. The Chechen definition of a free person, as well as I can formulate it, is a free person is one who knows the truth and is independent of environmental considerations or other influences in serving that truth.

Many of the processes taking place right now in the Chechen society are completely contrary to traditional Chechen values. Entirely contrary to Chechen spirit. Before the war, when we had only started building our sovereign state, Chechen society was convinced that the international community would never allow the kind of massacre that has since taken place. It was impossible to imagine that at the end of the 20th Century, just before the 21st Century, something of that scale would take place in the war against Chechnya.

Although the international community did somehow permit that massacre, that destruction of the Chechen people, atrocities such as the burning alive of women and chil-

dren, although the international community allowed that to happen, just when while it was celebrating the anniversary of a victory over Nazism, the Chechen people have not become angry with the world, and the Chechen people have not lost hope that they will find support in the international community.

Ms. BAGALOVA. I wanted to answer also your second question. You asked if we are present in other cities. We have our division in Moscow. The address that we are using is that of The Andre Sakharov Foundation in Moscow, and I am the director of that Moscow office.

Every 3 or 4 months, we are conducting a conference in Moscow on the migrations of society and culture in Chechnya. That is our connection, our thread connecting us to the civilized world. We really do not have any other connection.

That same connection, The Sakharov Foundation, has also made it possible for us to come to the United States.

Mr. BISULTANOV. In a practical sense, there are no cultural centers in Chechnya other than Groznyy. In all significant population centers such as Urtus-Martan, Gudermes, Argun, we have our representatives. Also, just before we came here for several months, we had an expedition that was working in the mountainous part of Chechnya. We had a project where we were recording the places and conditions of examples of the tower architecture—the old type of architecture in Chechnya. And, we were collecting folklore materials, recording traditional Chechen chants.

In Chechnya right now we have a cultural vacuum and a social vacuum because of the war. There are some people both in and outside of Chechnya who are trying to influence the developments in Chechnya and are trying to introduce some things that are really contrary to Chechen culture and tradition.

If you are talking about Islam, the Chechen Islamic tradition is the Sufi Islam that has over the years harmonically connected, or grown, together the Chechen cultural tradition. That is really what is closest to the Chechen spirit. Though right now there are attempts to introduce other kinds of Islamic thought or fundamentalism in Chechnya, I am sure that all that foreign influence, attempts and finances, are not going to achieve anything.

An introduction of elements of hard line fundamentalism and especially one that is using violent methods, terroristic methods, in Chechnya, and we know, of course, of the facts such as the killing of doctors from the Red Cross and taking hostages from different NGOs in Chechnya. All that is playing into the hands of some politicians in Russia and in some other places that would like to influence the development of a society in Chechnya in ways which are contrary to its traditions.

The aim of such actions is to isolate Chechnya, to create the situation there that will result in the absence of support from the democratic countries. Of course, we realize that if for tens of years we leave no choice to our people, no fruitful activity other than to kill or to be killed, then eventually people will progress to that stage and will degenerate to killing others.

In today's Chechnya, because of the war, the role of youth has drastically increased because most of the people who went through the war, who were actually participants in the war, were young people. These youths right now are in a terrible situation because they are cut off from the rest of the world. We have no useful economic activity available to them. There is no employment. There is nothing they can do with themselves. There is no education, no way for them to improve themselves available.

QUESTIONER. Joan Eichrodt. I would like to ask about the government support of culture and education. We know that teachers, for example, are not getting paid. Does the government have funds to support education at all, pay wages, and print textbooks or whatever? Or does it not have that?

I'm not just talking about teachers' pay but other forms of support for education. If they do have the money, is there anything that you can do or have been doing to put pressure on government officials to do this?

Mr. BISULTANOV. Today even in Russia, there are no funds to pay the teachers. I can say that in Chechnya, the Government of Chechnya has almost no funds for education. Thousands of people in Chechnya are homeless, have lost all property, are unprotected socially, thousands of wounded, handicapped, and so on.

In the 2 years that have passed since the end of the war, the Chechen Government really has had no chance of collecting funds that it would be able to use for education. Though Maskhadov has changed the government several times, I do not claim that the situation in the government is ideal. There is some corruption, clans, and back room deals. Some groups that are struggling for influence.

The president is in a very difficult situation with respect to all these different political forces. The only thing that we can point to as an achievement since 1991 in terms of legislation or governmental activities, is that we were able to conduct elections of the president and the parliament in the presence of international observers and conduct those successfully.

As everywhere in the former Soviet Union, they are experiencing difficulties in building civil society. In Chechnya, these difficulties, of course, are exaggerated many fold by the problems that are specific to Chechnya where more destruction has taken place.

QUESTIONER. I am Benjamin Tau, a former member of the assistance group to Chechnya of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Mr. Bisultanov referred to the problems that President Maskhadov is having. I wonder if he could give us some insight as to how he would interpret the calls of the military commanders, Shamil Basayev and Salmin Raduyev for the resignation of President Maskhadov and President Maskhadov's dismissal of his government? I guess it happened yesterday.

Mr. BISULTANOV. The fact that the government has changed, that it has resigned, was predetermined because that was a special government, the so-called Basayev's government which had a special mandate for half a year of work.

I cannot give you details of what is happening right now because we have been away from Chechnya for some time. But I can tell you that Basayev, on a personal level, has my complete confidence. He is my close friend. I voted for Basayev in the last election and actually supported him. I believe that he is one of the politicians in Chechnya right now who has the best prospects for some constructive political process.

I am very surprised by what had happened in the last few days because I know that Basayev's position is that Chechnya needs lawful completion of the Presidential term. There should be no impeachment or resignation of political infighting against the president until the next election.

So, I am surprised that he has combined forces with Raduyev and called for the resignation of Maskhadov. Nevertheless, I think that the rumors are somewhat exaggerated, and I do not seriously consider the possibility that Maskhadov will resign. I don't think that will happen.

Ms. TAFT. Would you like to respond?

QUESTIONER. Why do you think that these are rumors?

Mr. BISULTANOV. Because I have lived in Chechnya for a long time, and I have seen many events take place, and observed how they were covered from outside by the international media. In all these events, there was a significant difference between what was happening and what was presented in the media.

I also want to add that everybody is expecting exotic things from Chechnya—maybe another terrorist act, a bomb somewhere, a new war so that everybody would again become interested—so something unusual would be taking place.

Everybody's tired of presidents of large countries and now want to see something interesting taking place in Chechnya.

Mr. FINERTY. A question here. Thank you.

I'm John Finerty. I am with the Commission's staff.

Speaking of exotic things, when we do hear of Chechnya lately, the only thing we generally hear about is so-called Muslim fundamentalism. For instance, a little something saying that the Chechen Government is going to recognize Taliban or someone, I believe the foreign minister, criticized the United States for the attacks on the bin Laden facilities. I am sorry, vice president.

To what extent do you think that there really exists these ideas, this ideology, how deep is it in government or with the people?

Thank you.

Mr. BISULTANOV. In my opinion, there is maybe 1 percent of Chechen people who are seriously supporting the ideas of Islamic fundamentalists.

Mr. FINERTY. Would it in fact be the former government, perhaps?

Mr. BISULTANOV. Maybe 1 percent of Chechen population supports or is interested in Islamic fundamentalism. As to the details of such things such as the question of recognizing Taliban, I should tell you about that we have a very interesting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Oudougev. He has also managed to try to act in his time as an intermediary in the Kosovo crisis and in Iraq.

They needed to make those kind of statements in order to be able to receive funds from abroad. I can tell you responsibly there is not one instance where Chechens have taken any part in armed or terrorist activity outside Chechnya—outside the context of total war with Russia. The Chechen people are not interested in these things.

The people who are interested in promotion of a fundamentalist agenda in Chechnya create situations by making statements, provocative statements, such as the ones you mention, in order to cause complete isolation of Chechnya from the rest of the world. So that we would lose all opportunity of appeals to the international law, to block all work—to block all work in the direction of more contacts with the rest, more contacts with international organizations.

Also, I should add that in today's Chechnya, many people in the government are just opportunists, they should not be there. They are making use of government.

Ms. TAFT. Any other questions?

Yes sir. Would you mind using the mike?

QUESTIONER. Sure. The current prime minister of Russia, Yeugeniy Primakov, opposed the military invasion of Chechnya in 1995 and I understand that he has already initiated contact with President Maskhadov. How do you see the prospectus for a resolution of the differences between Russia and Chechnya with Mr. Primakov and before the year 2001?

Mr. BISULTANOV. I should acknowledge that I am surprised that Primakov has engaged on this part of contacts with Chechnya. I did not really take Primakov's prime ministership as a victory of democracy in Russia. But as a person, as an individual who has been always against the war and whose friends have been against the war, nevertheless, I have to tell you that no compromises with Russia on the question of Chechen independence are now possible. No negotiations will be conducted until Russia recognizes the independence of Chechnya.

Once this reality is acknowledged, I should tell you that it is my conviction, as well as of most other Chechens, that there will be very close contacts and cooperation between Chechnya and Russia because Chechnya cannot move away from Russia and Russia cannot move away from Chechnya. But it will always have to be on the basis of recognition of Chechen sovereignty.

QUESTIONER. And—contacts?

Mr. BISULTANOV. It will be like CIS. We are always ready to become members of CIS. We are ready for any kind of cooperation with Russia. But after the war, after the hundred thousand lost lives, and their toll on Chechnya, it is impractical, impossible, to talk of any compromise on the question of Chechen independence.

I want to share with you my puzzlement at some double standards used in discussing the problems of Chechnya. For example, Nagorno-Karabach, in the eyes of the international community, is part of Azerbaijan, yet the United States can provide direct humanitarian aid to Nagorno-Karabach. But Chechnya does not have the right to receive any direct aid.

I understand that there is a basic contradiction or conflict over this in the international law, that is in the principles of the territorial integrity and the right to self-determination.

Yet, we see that some exceptions are made for some places but for Chechnya, they do not even consider those kind of exceptions. If people are locked up like spiders in a glass jar, then the consequences of such actions will be exactly the same as with spiders. People will turn on each other with violence.

Another contradiction: in the eyes of the world we are painted as Islamic terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists, yet at the height of the war in Chechnya, we received no aid from those fundamentalist Islamic countries either.

Mr. FINERTY. Let's see now. Let's see, Lydia has a question. I think Lyoma might have wanted to say something.

Are there any other questions or any—

QUESTIONER. I asked about—

Mr. FINERTY. OK. I am sorry, Joe. Didn't see your hand. All right, then let us start with Lydia, then.

Joe, I did not see your hand. I am sorry. I saw Lydia's first.

QUESTIONER. I asked whether they experienced persecution from the Russian Government, from Chechen Government, or from the population. A little bit more about everyday activities of their organization.

Mr. BISULTANOV. I am one of those people for whom the poetry is the most important thing, even more important than life and death. I have never experienced any difficulty from the Chechen authorities because I am well known and loved by Chechen people for my poetry. But I can tell you that in 1996, I was detained by the Russian soldiers and taken to a filtration station where people who arrested me had all the documentation and

even articles about my poetry. So they knew who I was.

I was held there for 12 hours. I was blindfolded. Several times I was led to the wall for basically a staged execution where I was put against a wall. I heard shots. Of course, because I was blindfolded, I could not tell if they were aimed at me or not. They had been striking me on the fingernails so that I would not be able to write any more.

Luckily, very happily, I was soon released, so my fate was much better than the fate of many others. I was released because of very forceful and speedy intervention on my behalf on the Russian Pen club, the organization of the Russian writers and protests from other foreign writers' organizations. And protests from Chechens—there was an ongoing demonstration in Grozny. Radio Liberty was broadcasting about my detention.

But, hundreds and thousands of people have died victims of this, tortured to death by this system. Many are not yet—even the bodies are not found of many who perished in that system.

In 1995, together with my friend Lyoma here in the front row, we've been visiting Auschwitz and had perfect opportunity to compare the actions of two different fascist regimes.

Mr. FINERTY. All right, let us go with Joan and then Yeorman if there are no other questions. I think we'll—

Oh, we do have a question back there. OK, good.

QUESTIONER. This question is for Ms. Bagalova. The question will be about culture. Now, the government has no money. You have no money, and the situation is catastrophic. What can you do or what can be done? Or, is there anything that people outside Chechnya can do? You're talking about a huge problem.

Ms. BAGALOVA. In terms of the humanitarian aid, Lyoma Usmanof, who is present here, is instrumental in arranging the delivery of food stuffs to Chechnya in preparation for this winter season. He has the numbers to give you on that.

In terms of the culture, I want to say that we have a theater, the republican theater in Grozny has been rebuilt.

We have created our organization, LAM, to be able to rebuild Chechen cultural institutions but as of today the only help we have received in that is from the Andrei Sakharov Foundation. We have now in this visit to the United States established some contacts, and as a result we will receive some help. But this is yet only the beginning of the dialog. The cultural projects are not yet ready.

We have talked to many foundations and organizations. One of the things that we have got agreement on is a project with the help of the Soros Foundation—we will receive a number of documentaries and a radio—and the Soros Foundation will also provide the means for us to have our own radio broadcast.

The documentary film that we are preparing is called the "Museum of War," a documentary about the dead city of Grozny at the end of the war. The second project, which includes a documentary as part of it, is on the tower architecture of Chechnya which is the ancient mountain architecture, towers in the mountains.

The third one is for a collection and publishing of that collection of children's drawings called "The Children of the War."

When I am back in Moscow a few days from now, we are planning another meeting again in the Sakharov Museum, a meeting with the Chechen diaspora and influential people of the Chechen diaspora and of people in Moscow to talk about restoration of cultural institutions of Chechnya, about collections of funds for cultural purposes in Chechnya.

I want to add a little bit if you are talking about on the scale of the whole Chechen republic, our main bet is on establishing close contacts and cooperation with NGOs from around the world. It is well known that some very well established, well respected funds, for example Rockefeller Foundation, provide significant help in the area of culture to other countries, including countries in the post-Soviet space, former Soviet Union.

An understanding and very good and close relationship that we have with the Sakharov Foundation in Moscow because of some special tensions or relations between Chechnya and Moscow, we also need to establish with organizations outside Russia. That was the purpose of this trip here. We also are planning a trip to Europe. This is the direction of this work and we have great hopes we will be understood and that we will establish good cooperation with organizations in our work to restore Chechen culture.

We have very good contacts and prospects in Poland. We have sent students to study in Poland. We have several Chechen students in different cities in Poland. We are looking for contacts in Finland, in Czech<?> where we also have some very good hopes. In Los Angeles we had good meetings discussing possible ways non-governmental funds can help us in education especially. The funds from Malaysia and Indonesia. We were discussing this through the fund of Omar ibn Hatab in Los Angeles. We have become familiar with their activities, especially the network schools that they have in Los Angeles. Also in Atlanta at Emory University we have had discussions.

We've had some very good experiences because of everything. They are growing. Right now they are still just beginning but we are growing. We are gaining experience and our contacts will hopefully grow also.

Mr. FINERTY. Lyoma and then back there.

QUESTIONER. My name is Lyoma Usmanov. I am also one of the founding members of the LAM organization, but in the last year I have been living in Washington and have been representing the interests of Chechen Government.

My question is directed to Ms. Bagalova.

The question has to do with how do Chechen women live? Do they wear chadra? Do they cover up their faces or not? How do they—do they work or not? Or, how do their everyday lives look like?

Ms. BAGALOVA. The Chechen women are not significantly different from women anywhere in the world, especially European women. We have some very small number which have attracted a lot of attention from the media every time they take a television shot. The media prefer to show women who have adopted a sort of Arabic style in clothing but there are very few of such women.

These women had taken a very active part in the war—directly helping their men in the fighting. I am—I admire those women. But if you ever read even Russian classical literature or travel literature of the Western explorers in Caucuses and in the East, even back in the 18th and 19th Century they always were noting that the Chechen women were the most free women in Caucuses.

Chechen women are very actively pursuing all sorts of careers outside the home. There are actresses, engineers, doctors.

Mr. SEMYONOV. The comment from the left was—often ministers—and the comment from the right was that is happening very seldomly now.

Ms. BAGALOVA. Of course, Chechen women have given birth to those freedom loving men.

Mr. FINERTY. Thank you.

I think we'll make this the last question here. We may have a little bit of time if anybody wants to come up for any personal discussions. But this will be the last formal question and then we'll close.

Thank you.

QUESTIONER. I'm Nicolai Burkevic. I work for the Union of Counsels for Soviet Jews. And my organization is very concerned about discrimination in cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg against people of Caucasian nationality. So, I wondered if Ms. Bagalova could talk a little bit about the relationship with the Moscow authorities, the relations of her center, how they get along.

Ms. BAGALOVA. You mean in an every day sense?

QUESTIONER. Yes, if there's been any problems and—

Ms. BAGALOVA. On a personal level or if I can describe some facts about others?

QUESTIONER. Well, for her center and if both panelists could maybe, if there's time, talk about what they've observed or personally experienced as far as—

Ms. BAGALOVA. First of all, I live in Grozny. We have an office in Moscow but I only come there to work occasionally. My permanent address is in Grozny.

Personally, I was never stopped in Moscow but my sons, even though they look completely—they have a very European look to them, they are constantly harassed and stopped on the streets in Moscow when they come there.

Personally, I was never stopped maybe because they do not consider women worthy of harassment.

Mr. BISULTANOV. But I can state absolutely—though jokingly—with absolute confidence that all the troubles in Russia occur because of Caucasian Jews. You can ask and get that information first-hand, sort of straight from the horse's mouth whether you talk to a minister or to a person—or to a woman selling stuff at the market. The answer will be the same—Caucasian Jews are to blame for everything.

Mr. FINERTY. Thank you very much for coming today and we hope to have more presentation of this way as the session moves along.

Thank you.

(Whereupon, the briefing was concluded at 3:42 p.m.,.)