

I thank the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe for this important briefing to bring attention to the humanitarian situation in my homeland. In 1994, before any military conflict with Russia, the population of Chechnya was estimated at about one million people. The current figure of Chechen population, according to the Danish Refugee Council is approximately 660, 000 people.

In accordance with the same source there are some 92, 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the territory of Ingushetia. 15,000 of them live in five tent camps, 27,000 live in spontaneous points (former industrial buildings, former dairy, poultry and pig farms.) Conditions at these spontaneous points are not appropriate for living, especially in farms. Cows and people live in the same building. 50`000 IDPs live in private accommodation with host families. Most of them rent apartments for payment. Since the beginning of the war there was strong desire of Russian authorities to keep people inside Chechnya, to stop them from fleeing to neighboring republics. For example, on October 29, 1999 a civilian convoy was bombed by Russian Forces airplanes. Many people died. But people managed to escape from on-going bombardments, artillery shelling by fleeing to neighboring republics and all over Russia. The majority of IDPs were settled in neighboring republic Ingushetia (the distance between Ingush border and the capital of Chechnya Grozny is 60 km).

Since December 2002 the indirect pressure on IDPs in Ingushetia has increased. Though the officials of Russian authorities assure that there will not be involuntary repatriation of IDPs to Chechnya, there are many examples which prove the opposite. Only few of them are enlisted below:

1. Camps: The tent camp “Iman” was closed in Aki-Yurt/Ingushetia in December 2002. Thousands of people were left without shelter. Alternative shelter offered in Ingushetia and Chechnya did not have elementary conditions for life with dignity. No electricity, no water, and at some places no latrines. In Chechnya returnees found half-repaired houses. Those who returned back to Chechnya to Temporary Accommodation Centers were taken out from Ingushetia beneficiary lists. In Chechnya many of them were subjected to night raids, some of members were abducted, and some disappeared. When they decided to return back to Ingushetia it was too late: no camp, no access to governmental humanitarian assistance, and no means for survival. Now IDPs in Ingushetia are concerned about the closure of 5 remained tent camps.
2. Hosts: The Federal Migration Service does not cover public utility costs of the Ingush people hosting Chechen IDPs for free. It increases the tension between host families and IDPs. If earlier they promised to pay, now they do not hide that they are not planning to pay financial debt to Ingushetia. There are regular electricity and water cuts in tents and spontaneous points and less often in private accommodation sector.

3. Spontaneous Points: The hosts of spontaneous points set dates for IDPs to leave these spots. They explain that by necessity that they need to use those premises for their own interests, such as for business. This Chechen war is in its fourth year, and the local population is tired of long presence of IDPs, which is quite understandable. There were some street fights between locals and Chechen IDP men. The long-lasting conflict is becoming a heavy burden for local Ingush population.

4. Assistance: International NGOs cannot open functioning representative offices in Chechnya because of security. It means that humanitarian aid going there is not able to cover majority of population of Chechnya. And very often it is able to cover only vulnerable categories such as invalids, orphans, one-parent children, which is very good, but not enough. Without accountability NGOs and UN agencies cannot release aid. The result is that there is a hunger in Chechnya and the Russian Government does not do anything to change the situation.

I thank the US government for its direct assistance to my organization, World Vision, and to other non-governmental organizations working in Ingushetia and Chechnya. You are our lifeline. I also thank you for your contributions to international organizations through the United Nations that also help us greatly. Please also keep your attention on us so we are not forced to go to Chechnya until there are adequate conditions there.

Thank you.