



CHECHNYA PEACE FORUM

World Chechen Congress

Warsaw, Poland 17th September 2010.

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The last 250 years of history in Chechnya - this little republic in the Caucasus' mountains of the South-East corner of Europe - has been one of endless brutal Russian conquest, war crimes and genocide against the Chechen people.

The first genocide took place during the Russian conquest in the 1780s. The noble Chechen leader Sheik Mansur Ushurma – peace be upon him – was captured and said this at the Russian court hearing:

“Peace will come when Russian soldiers will stop spreading death on our earth. Only after their armies came to the Caucasus did we realize that we had lived as in Paradise until then. We had only one thing to do – defend ourselves. The only thing that I, and my countrymen are guilty of, is that we have defended the life and the earth that God has given to us. What example and culture can one get from a land that enslave and torture its subjects. By this court proceeding against me you are trying to conceal all the lies, treachery and fraudulence you have brought to the Caucasus.”

Sheik Mansur - 220 years ago. It might as well have been a statement of yesterday!

The Chechens continued their resistance in the early 19th century and were continuously besieged, overpowered and persecuted by the Russians. Memories of the horrific atrocities carried out by the Russian general Alexey Yermolov still strike terror into Chechen people.

From 1834 there was an all out war between Russia and Chechnya. The Chechens bravely defended themselves under their legendary leader Imam Shamil – may he rest in peace. More than half the Chechen population perished over the following 25 years and Shamil had to surrender Chechnya to Russian colonization in 1859. **This was the second Russian genocide inflicted on Chechnya.**

In February 1944, during the Second World War, Stalin in his complete madness ordered a full deportation of the entire Chechen population of half a million from Chechnya to Central Asia and Siberia. Again, the suffering was indescribable and again half the population perished. **This holocaust was the third genocide upon the Chechen people** – and has subsequently been recognized as such by the European Parliament.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 Russia has again waged two fully fledged and indiscriminate wars on Chechnya, killing as many as up to a quarter of a million people, most of whom were innocent civilians. This has represented a quarter of the current Chechen population and is **the fourth genocide inflicted by the Russians upon the Chechen people**. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Part in 1956, the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev held his famous “secret speech” confronting the evils of the Stalin period. He reinstated the Chechen-Ingush republic, and only then could Chechens return and re-inhabite their land.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude the following:

Throughout history Chechnya has desperately tried to defend its just right to self determination and freedom, and never voluntarily accepted the colonialism, occupation and suppression by the Russian people.

Russia has through its consistent unlawful and criminal conduct lost all right to occupy, suppress and terrorize the Chechen people. Chechnya has the right to self determination and freedom!

As a human rights campaigner I am appalled at the indifference by the so-called “International Community” in relation to world crises. It goes for war atrocities, crimes against humanity and even genocide - and applies to individuals, nations and international organizations. It is not for the lack of political instruments - we have the United Nations, the Council of Europe, G20, International Courts, International Human Rights Conventions – and we have well developed civilized minds that know so well the difference between right and wrong.

Yet when crises occur we too often fall short of determined and resolute action to save victims and to bring perpetrators to justice. This inaction is often explained as “Realpolitik.” I would call it: “Immorality, Irresponsibility and Cowardice.”

As director of Chechnya Peace Forum my particular concern is for Chechnya and its people. Chechnya is on European territory and therefore the explicit jurisdiction of the Council of Europe, but also, of course, a concern for the European Parliament.

Chechnya Peace Forum’s mission is to restore liberty – human rights – democracy – and the rule of law to the people of Chechnya, but we realize that this cannot be viewed in isolation and must be seen in the context of what else is happening in Russia and the Caucasus.

That is why we also seek to bring to attention the non-existence of democracy in Russia. The Kremlin call their way: “Sovereign Democracy.” A more accurate term would be: “So-called Democracy.” Some Russia experts refer to it as a “**police state**” or even a “**gangster state.**”

What characterizes the Russian society today is a profound absence of justice and the rule of law, massive corruption, the murders of journalists, dissidents and human rights campaigners, suppression of political opposition, de facto press censorship and elements of extreme nationalism and xenophobia. The legal system is corrupt and its services are available to the highest or most powerful bidder, whether it is political or criminal. Add to this an election system with a threshold for political representation that effectively bars diversity and promotes political monopoly. Nor is it coincidental that the Kremlin has developed a youth organization “Nashi,” an ideological brigade of 100.000 members that are used for support rallies for the president, or harassment of political opposition.

The Russian society today is in fundamental and deliberate imbalance. This is an objective in itself, because it serves to legitimize the suppression of democracy and civil liberties - the absence of which is essential for the number one political end for the Kremlin – to retain control for itself.

From this it also follows that a balanced and open society with civil liberties, the rule of law, a true democracy with press freedom and a diversified political environ represent a threat to the Kremlin and the FSB: their power base and control could not survive with these virtues prevailing.

The West should pay careful attention to this and start addressing the task of fostering democracy in Russia. A good starting point is to insist on freedom and self determination for the Chechen people.

From the brutal Russian warfare in Chechnya I conclude that:

- 1. Russia violates the UN Charter and Human Rights Convention.**
- 2. Russia violates the Charter and Human Rights Convention of the Council of Europe**
- 3. Russia violates the Peace Treaty signed by presidents Yeltsin and Maskadov 12th May 1997.**
- 4. Russia should be tried at an international Court for their war crimes in Chechnya.**
- 5. Russia violates international law – because Chechnya should have had its rightful independence and sovereignty along with all other previous Union republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. It therefore also violates the Supreme Soviet resolutions of April 1990 which preceded the dissolution of the Union.**

The last point requires an elaboration.

As part of the process that led up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, three remarkable resolutions were passed by the Supreme Soviet on 3rd, 10th and 26th of April in 1990.

These resolutions not only allowed, but actually urged the Union republics to hold referendums and elections, declare independence and establish their own constitutions, parliaments and governments. Autonomous republics, such as Chechnya, were given the

right to elevate themselves to Union republics and run through the procedure required for sovereignty.

In accordance with this legislation The Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush republic on 27th November 1990 adopted a “Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush republic,” proclaiming it a sovereign state that was going to participate in Union and Federation treaties on equal footing with the other Union republics. The declaration was endorsed by the Soviet leader of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Socialist Republic, Mr. Doku Zavgayev. He had been appointed First Secretary of the Communist party in 1989.

From this day Chechnya was a sovereign entity on the same legal level as all the other Union republics that claimed independence the following year. On 8th June 1991 the Chechen National Congress reconfirmed Chechnya’s independence. Chechnya adopted its Constitution on 12th March 1992.

Chechnya was also present at the meeting which was to be in Moscow on the 20th August 1991 when the Union republics’ representatives had gathered to sign a new Union Treaty. This was part of Russian president Boris Yeltsin’s drive to have the Soviet Union dissolved. However, the day before, on 19th August Soviet president Gorbachev was dramatically detained at his dacha by the Black Sea in a coup d’état or – “putsch.” Hard line conservative communists were behind the action and the intention was to thwart the abolition of the Soviet Union. Many people suspect, however, that the putsch against Gorbachev was in fact orchestrated by himself – in a desperate attempt to save the Union from dissolution. With Perestroika and Glasnost he had embarked on a process which, for him, span out of control and went much further than he had envisaged.

A treaty to the same effect was signed by the major republics in early December, this time without the presence of Chechnya. On 26th December 1991 the Council of Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR declared the dissolution of the Union and also dissolved itself.

The Soviet Union had ceased to exist.

Vladimir Putin has termed the event: **“The greatest geo-political catastrophe of the last century.”**

I would say it was one of the greatest political miracles of all time.

Russia illegally included the Chechen territory into its own Constitution in 1993, and equally illegally went to war against the Chechen republic in 1994. As Yeltsin put it: *“To bring about constitutional order.”* About 100.000 Chechens were killed and the towns were bombed to rubble. However, the Russians also took heavy losses and the war became increasingly unpopular in Russia. Before the up-coming presidential election in 1996 Yeltsin decided to pull out, and after a preliminary peace accord in Khasav-Yurt 30th August 1996, a peace

treaty was signed by president Yeltsin and Chechnya's newly elected President Aslan Maskadov on 12th May 1997. The two parties committed to not resort to violence in any future conflict.

This treaty is also a very strong documentation for Chechnya's independence. It is a treaty signed by two heads of state and bears all the characteristics of closing an *international* conflict. Indeed, this is another *Russian* recognition of Chechnya's legal status as a sovereign state.

Four months earlier, on 27th January there had been a general election in Chechnya. The new Parliament was formed and Aslan Maskadov was elected president. The election was monitored by OSCE who characterized it "*free and fair.*" Upon reflection; it may just have been the only "free and fair" election in all of the previous Soviet Union!

It should be added that a couple of days after the election, 3rd February, Yeltsin sent Maskadov a letter to congratulate him on winning the Chechen presidency. President to president, state to state – another strong Russian recognition of Chechnya's sovereignty!

This is all the more noteworthy because the election is based on the Chechen Constitution adopted by the Chechen Parliament at the time of president Dudaev in March 1992. Article 1 of this Constitution reads as follows:

The Chechen republic is a sovereign democratic and legal state created as a result of self determination of the Chechen people. It has the supreme right concerning the territory and national riches; independently determines external and internal policies, adopts Constitution and laws taking effect in its territory. The state sovereignty of the Chechen republic is indivisible.

A letter of congratulations to president Maskadov is therefore a recognition of the election's legitimacy, and implicitly also of the Constitution upon which the election is based.

The Constitution of March 1992, adopted by the legally elected Chechen Parliament is the only legal Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria today!

Two years later, in autumn 1999, president Yeltsin had just got himself a new Prime Minister; Vladimir Putin, who came from the top job of the Russian secret police, FSB. Upon introducing him, Yeltsin, declared that "*He will succeed me as president*" and "*Putin will solve the Chechen problem for good.*" To the latter Putin replied: "*Yes, and we will do the last one – even if we have to pull him out of the shithouse.*" Some statement from a newly elected Prime Minister!

In September 1999 bomb explosions in blocks of flats in Moscow and other cities at night killed 294 innocent civilian Russians. Putin was quick to put the blame on Chechen

separatists and he mobilized for an all-out military campaign against the little Caucasian neighbour.

There is, however, an abundance of evidence that the bombings were carried out by the FSB itself in a cynical operation to produce a pretence for a new Russian war on Chechnya, the purpose of which should be to secure the Presidency for the then totally unknown Vladimir Putin in the Russian spring election of 2000. My friends Anna Politkovskaya and Alexander Litvinenko have written extensively about it, and they were both murdered for it. The previous Prime Minister Sergej Stepashin has disclosed that the second war on Chechnya had actually been planned by the FSB as early as in March 1998 – when Putin was its top man.

The war was waged on Chechnya, Yeltsin resigned on New Year's Eve, Putin became acting president, and sufficiently well known to win the presidency a few months later. It should be added, however, that several news media had interesting documentation of massive election rigging in Putin's favour to secure him the result.

The FSB got their man in place!

The past ten years – the Putin years – have been a continued calamity for Chechnya. Ramzan Kadyrov, a thug with an extensive criminal record was appointed president in Chechnya by Putin. The republic is occupied by a foreign land and run by a Quisling (traitor) government. There is a rule of fear and oppression. Abductions, torture, extrajudicial killings and other rights violations committed by Russian forces and their local collaborators are commonplace. Obviously, there is complete suppression of freedom of speech and any opposition is effectively eliminated. The economy, industry and social services are in shatters and unemployment sky high.

150 000 Chechens have fled to rescue in Western Europe.

The Chechen military resistance has radicalized and become a marginalized fundamentalist group resorting to regular and increasing acts of terrorism, now rapidly spreading all over Northern Caucasus. Only last week a suicide bomber killed 17 and wounded 150 innocent civilians in the market place of Vladikavkaz in neighboring North Ossetia. These terrorist actions that are now completely out of control are the result of prolonged oppression – because injustice attracts and fosters extremism. The responsibility for this heinous act was declared by Doku Umarov the same day.

Several experts have been pointing to the alleged connection and symbiosis between the Russian authorities - and their apparent counterpart - the extreme militant resistance in the Chechen woods, currently represented by Doku Umarov. This has been documented on a

number of occasions. It means that the Kremlin provides support and facilitation for terrorist attacks on their own innocent civilians within Russia – the responsibility of which is declared by Chechen resistance – thereby stigmatizing Chechens in general – and legitimizing Russian authoritarian rule and general suppression of democratic processes. Umarov's terrorist actions cause enormous damage to the civilized and justified cause by the responsible Chechen liberation movement – a fact that serves Russian interests perfectly. This cynical plot is Chechnya's worst enemy today!

The Russians know full well they can obtain peace in the region through a constructive dialogue with the true and proper representatives of the Chechen people. President Aslan Maskadov repeatedly invited to such peace talks. After him, Akhmed Zakaev and his colleagues have done the same, pointing to the dangers of the conflict radicalizing and spreading all through the Northern Caucasus. Until now they have only been rebuffed by the Russians.

This tells me that what Russia wants in the Northern Caucasus is not peace – but continued conflict!

The reasons, as I have suggested before, is to contain an internal Russian situation of real danger serving to legitimizing a strong authoritarian rule and suppressing democratic institutions and values – for the purpose of retaining control for its own elite. For this reason I am extremely suspicious about who was really behind the bombings at the metro in Moscow in March and the recent upsurge of terrorism in the Caucasus, including the contemptible attack on innocent civilians in North Ossetia last week. Following all the confusion lately surrounding Doku Umarov, the apparent leader of the so-called Caucasian Emirate, there is reason to expect more news about his destiny in the coming months.

The common international judgment is that Russia has completely and totally failed in their Northern Caucasus policies. This, of course is true. However, if my assumptions about Russia's real objectives are correct **they have, in their own judgment, not failed!**

Through continued terror and suppression of freedom and human rights they have maintained a situation of continued conflict and instability – precisely what they want. They have also succeeded in dividing the Chechen people and scaring off a reaction from a timid and demoralized International Community! **From their own perspective: A success!** However, in addition to the suffering and degradation they inflict upon the Northern Caucasus peoples, they are playing with fire around the powder keg – and the result could be disastrous.

The question is: How long are we going to allow this to continue?

When Dmitry Medvedev was elected – or more accurately: appointed – president, Russians and the world looked to him with hope for change. As for human rights, he shortly after his inauguration to office in May 2008 said to the CNN:

Every people has the right to self determination.

However, Medvedev has now been in power for two and half years – and Ladies and Gentlemen - there is nothing substantial to document a shift to a more constructive, modern or more liberal line of policy! This tells me that either is he fully aligned with Putin's concepts – or he is completely under Putin's control. The only thing we can hope for is that Medvedev in secrecy harbors some ambition for re-election in 2012, and now tactically builds long term support for a contest with Putin when the time is right.

Chechens home and abroad must now unite in the efforts to liberate their country. Let me again remind you of Sheik Mansur who constantly preached about the **necessity of unity, discipline and combined action.**

The Chechen exile government, represented by Chairman of the Cabinet, Mr. Akhmed Zakaev and his government has consistently been promoting a responsible and determined line of policy towards self determination, freedom and democracy – based on reason, mediation and law, - and the denouncement of terror by anyone. This is the line of policy that Chechnya Peace Forum has strongly supported and – I pledge to you all – will continue to support until the goal has been achieved.

Regrettably and shamefully the International Community has remained silent over Chechnya. Russia has inflicted horrific war crimes upon the Chechen population, leaving a regime of fear and oppression and 250 000 people dead. This does not seem to have moved the Council of Europe, the EU or the UN to action. These institutions have been built on fine words in their human rights conventions, but they are just that: **Fine Words!**

In February 1996, in the heat of the on-going Russian bloodbath in Chechnya during the first war, Russia was given full membership into the Council of Europe – an organization which has one principle task: To uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law in its area. I will say no more!

When reality strikes and people are intimidated, oppressed and killed in a remote corner of Europe – far away from Europe's own self-interests - Europe, and the US or UN for that matter, go silent, and in the case of Chechnya -go morally bankrupt. They get confused and paralyzed out of misunderstood submissiveness towards the non-democratic Russia with its strategic international position and petroleum riches. By so doing, they not only abandon the international rule of law – they abandon the self-evident human rights of all people, and they contribute to making the world a much more dangerous place for us all.

Chechnya Peace Forum will play its part in holding the international society to its responsibilities and obligations. I am encouraged that the Council of Europe's Rapporteur on Northern Caucasus, Dick Marty, had his penetrating and damning report on Chechnya unanimously passed in the Council' Parliamentary Assembly back in June. I am also encouraged that the Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Committee for Human

Rights, Heidi Hautala, is actively participating at this conference. We will also explore Chechnya's legal rights in the framework of events in the nineties that I have referred to previously, and also the Kosovo decision by the International Court in the Hague earlier this year. This decision, acknowledging Kosovo's right to secede from Serbia and declare independence, was also implicitly accepted by the Serbian president when he decided last week not to challenge it in the UN.

But what we now need is individuals with courage and integrity to form a Commission to lift the Chechen question in every aspect in order to reach decisions and implementations. I hope the Russians will understand it is also very much in their own interest to actively contribute. Chechnya Peace Forum is ready to be part of any such constructive process.

Together we shall succeed in bringing stability, rule of law, freedom, civil liberties and democracy to the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

Ivar Amundsen

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