

## Statement

from the Chechen Committee for National Salvation on the situation in the Chechen Republic.

The intensification of punitive "special and cleansing operations" conducted by Russian security forces in the Chechen Republic has recently reached increasingly alarming proportions. Not only is the nature and scale of the terror perpetrated against Chechen civilians shocking, but so is the cynical and blatant support for war criminals offered by virtually all branches of the Russian government.

The televised broadcast of civilian corpses, presented as "killed militants," the simulation of real combat followed by the shelling of populated areas, hostage-taking, extrajudicial executions, torture, and many other war crimes are officially declared as "fighting terrorism" and "eliminating another bandit group." Yet no one seems afraid to speak out about the murder of civilians anymore.

Thus, following the very recent (November-December) monstrous crimes committed by Russian troops in the town of Argun, Chechen Prosecutor Vsevolod Chernov declared that "seven people were killed" in that town. In this regard, it is worth emphasizing two important points that perfectly describe the current situation in Chechnya:

First, while in the past, when discussing civilian deaths, Russian authorities consistently emphasized that they were "militants" or "bandits," today they don't even consider it necessary to state this.

Second, it is important to note that the murder of seven people was mentioned by none other than the Prosecutor General of the Chechen Republic, the person responsible for ensuring respect for the law and the rule of law.

On December 15, Russian television stations showed a senior Russian official claiming that over 600 Chechen militants were stationed in Grozny, later showing a map of the city indicating the number of "bandits" in each of the four districts. The army appears to have a plan to exterminate the republic's civilian population, apparently approved by the highest levels of Russian power. There is no doubt that even larger-scale "special operations" will soon begin in Grozny to "identify and destroy gangs," and at least 600 local residents, mostly young men, will fall victim to the army, later, of course, declared militants.

Russian troops' punitive operations have intensified, especially during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Residents of Chechnya are reporting not only a sharp increase in the number of punitive "special operations" during this period, but also an increase in illegal actions by military personnel, increased tolls at checkpoints, and outright mockery and abuse of Chechen religious sensibilities.

Since late December, Russian media have reported that Russian military forces are conducting "major special operations to identify and eliminate members of armed gangs" in the Kurchaloy district. Russian state television recently broadcast a report filmed in the area. A senior Russian military officer, standing before dozens of executed corpses, claims to have "killed 70 bandits and captured 20 others." However, the killed Chechens were actually civilians and had no connection to armed groups.

From all this, one conclusion emerges: the Russian authorities, as they did during the Tsarist and Soviet eras, have decided to bring the Chechen population to the average level of other populations in the North Caucasus, between 300,000 and 500,000. Finding any other explanation for the actions of Russian security forces in Chechnya is virtually impossible.

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