



# Chechnya

## The politics of terror

### Report

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# **THE POLITICS OF TERROR**

**A Médecins Sans Frontières  
report  
November 2000**

The war in Chechnya is not over. More than a year after the federal troops first intervened, bombs, mines and bullets continue to kill civilians. Despite the illusion of normalization upheld by the Russian authorities, and the resignation of the international community, the violence against civilians is ongoing, and has merely changed its appearance. Data from Chechnya hospitals shows that the indiscriminate use of force is still causing many civilian casualties.

The war, which caused hundred of thousands to flee, has entered a new phase. After intensive bombing and massive destruction, the army, in the «re-conquered» zones, has turned a more vicious form. It has installed a state of terror, perpetrating acts of violence designed to humiliate civilians: arbitrary executions and mopping-up operations, arrests and disappearances, extortion, racketeering of cadavers...

The Russian forces have transformed Chechnya into a vast ghetto. In this ghetto, every civilian is a suspect, and freedom of movement is denied. Even the sick and wounded are prevented from passing through military checkpoints. And each and every checkpoint is a «Russian roulette» which puts their lives at stake.

In this ghetto, terror reigns. After having been subjected to months of intensive bombardment, the people of Chechnya are today exposed to the worst kind of violence. In the absence of a coherent international response and of sanctions against the perpetrators of these crimes, Chechen civilians, deprived of any kind of protection or recourse, are trapped in a confrontation with soldiers whose impunity gives them free rein to act as they please.

Confronted, on the field, with a terrorized population, and with needs that humanitarian organizations cannot meet, Médecins Sans Frontières has responded to the invitation of the Council of Europe, and has come here today to bear witness to the unacceptable events now taking place in Chechnya. The witness accounts - of medical personnel, residents, the sick and the wounded - were gathered by our teams between August and November 2000, during their relief work. Through their accounts of daily incidents, the witnesses portray the unbearable reality of the Chechen people's lives. They clearly describe the impossibility of dealing with medical emergencies, the perils faced by those who dare to seek hospital care, and the continuation of war...

## **I. The consequences of the war on civilian lives**

### Civilian casualties

One year after the conflict started, war injuries are still the leading cause of death in most of Chechnya's hospitals. In September and October, there were over 200 new war wounded reported in local medical facilities. Almost half of those hospitalized were women, children or the elderly. These numbers only reflect the wounded admitted in 12 of the over 30 hospitals still functioning in Chechnya. The total is, without question, far higher.

Hospitals report on a constant stream of civilian casualties resulting from gunfire and artillery, from aerial attacks and mines. Bombs intended for the Russian military or police outposts have also been placed in areas where civilians live. The military forces in Chechnya have paid scant regard for civilian casualties or civilian space in the conduct of the war. Villagers live in constant terror of indiscriminate gunfire which fills the nights throughout Chechnya.

*«During the day it's more or less quiet here, but at night it's terrifying. There is a post on the main road right above the village. They get drunk and shoot all night. Just last week two*

*armored vehicles came into the village at night. My husband ran out of the house and hid. They were screaming: «Kill him! Kill him!» They were shooting right into our house. How can I live here with my children? After that I went back to my home village (...). Almost every night I have to bring my children down to the basement because of the shooting (...). They are scared.»*

- Resident of Prigorodnoe, 43 years old

When the Russian jets flew overhead, 16-year old Adam didn't think of seeking cover. He had come to the edge of Duba-Yurt in late July with his father and grandfather, to cut hay and clean up the village cemetery. «*The plane made several passes over the village before opening fire directly on the cemetery*» explained Adam's uncle, who was in an adjacent field. «*When I ran to them, I saw that Adam's father and grandfather were already dead. Adam was still alive but covered in blood. Many of the gravestones were broken and shattered.*» Adam is now a patient in a hospital south of Grozny, where doctors are not sure he will ever regain full use of his legs.

### Daily perils

For many Chechens people, subsistence agriculture is the only way to keep their families alive. But it has become a high-risk activity. Sixteen-year-old Ilias, from a village close to Grozny, was wounded in an explosion that killed five of his relatives. The vehicle in which the whole family was driving to the fields to cut hay, hit a mine. Ilias was taken to the hospital in Grozny, his legs and hips shattered by the blast. Daily activities such as going to work, fetching wood, or simply moving from one place to another present the same risks.

### A return compromised by insecurity

Around 300,000 people are still displaced, either inside or outside the Chechen Republic. Half of these are in Ingushetia, which still provides shelter for 150,000 people. Despite the prospect of spending a second winter in appalling conditions, and despite their attachment to their land, a huge number of refugees and displaced persons have decided not to return to Chechnya. This is due as much to the destruction of their homes and the loss of their possessions as it is to the terror imposed by the Russian army in re-conquered zones. In a survey conducted by MSF teams last summer among displaced Chechens in the Ingush district of Malgobeck, 98% of those interviewed said they wanted to return home, but more than 70% of them felt that insecurity in Chechnya prevented them from doing so.

## **II. A constant climate of terror**

### Civilians subjected to the indiscriminate violence of Russian forces

The witness accounts gathered recently by MSF teams describe indiscriminate shootings, arbitrary arrests, summary executions, beatings, etc. which the people of Chechnya are subjected to daily. Abuses such as these are most often committed by Russian soldiers during the «zachistka» or clean-up operations aimed at rooting out «terrorists». Most, however, are committed on a daily basis, in a wholly arbitrary fashion, during displacements of populations, and especially at military checkpoints set up at all major intersections and entry points.

*«On October 1<sup>st</sup> I went to my brother's house. Then I went home with a friend. It was about 8 o'clock in the evening. And that night, as usual, the federals started to shoot (...). We walked quickly, hoping that the shots wouldn't hit us. I thought they were mostly firing in the air. All of a sudden I felt something warm on my legs. It was blood. I had been hit in my right thigh».*

- Resident of Argun

### Arrests and tortures

*«It's impossible to live here. They arrest people all over the place – for no reason. For young men, it's dangerous to be anywhere on the street. They pick them up and take them to army headquarters. They beat them».* Doctor, Urus Martans district

Many civilians are arrested under the pretext that their papers are not in order, that they're not in the right place, or any other number of reasons. No one is exempt from these arrests, though they mainly affect young men, who are suspected of being fighters.

Some of those arrested are tortured, as witnessed by doctors who have treated them in hospitals. But the victims of this violence are so afraid that most of them don't dare file any complaints, and don't even want to go to a hospital for fear that they will be registered and once again pursued. Medical personnel relate that some patients were arrested inside the hospitals and later found dead. In September the staff of the Stari Atagi hospital explained that one patient had been arrested and taken away by the Russian forces. Several days later, his body was found in a field. A legal doctor testified that he had been beaten to death.

*«In the past two months, we've been seeing a lot of people who were previously arrested. They suffer from multiple injuries. Fractures, head injuries. Some of them tell me how they were treated. Several said they had put some kind of metal wires over them and shocked them with electricity. They are so scared that most of them come out not talking. They try not to come to the hospital, because we register them. None of them file any complaints. They don't want to go through that hell again. In our report, we put down that the cause of injuries was abuse by the federals, but they never come to ask what happened - not the prosecutors, not the military.»*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District

*«I examined the body myself. The scalp had been completely removed like a cap cut all the way around his skull. We never found the scalp. This was clearly done when he was still alive. Three fingers had also been cut off with what looked like a pair of shears. This was done when he was alive. You can tell by the extent of the bleeding from the wounds».*

Doctor, Grozny

### «Zachitska»: clean-up operations

«Clean-up operations» aimed at finding «terrorists» can occur at any moment. Civilians live terrorized by the brutality of these operations, which often lead to massive arrests. Those apprehended are first brought to a location where their families must rush to pay ransoms. When the relatives arrive too late, the detained are taken to a filtration camp where the price for their freedom increases. In the end, some families can only «purchase» a cadaver.

*«I live in Grozny with my family. On November 12<sup>th</sup> I awoke to a lot of screaming. I looked out the window and saw the back courtyard filled with soldiers, their guns raised as if taking aim. I thought it was just a regular 'zachistka', so I told my eldest sons to get their documents ready. I returned to the window and saw the soldiers kicking a young man who was lying prostrate on the ground. My brother lives on the first floor, I was very worried about him, and I wanted to go down to check he was all right. I opened the door and tried to make my way down the stairs. The second floor was filled with soldiers and they screamed at me to go back to my apartment. They were dragging a man by the feet down the stairs. His face was burnt black. I headed back to my room. The soldiers followed. They ordered my children up against the wall. They were barking orders and threatening us. The soldiers ransacked the room, rifled through books, turned over the tables, searched under the bed mattresses. They found a black leather belt. They said it was a military belt. «Where did you*

*get this?» I didn't know, I didn't know what to say. They said I was lying. «What are your boys doing?» they said. 'We'll teach you how to study, we'll finish your education».*

- Resident, Grozny

### **III. Obstacles to health care**

#### Destroyed health structures

Chechnya's hospitals have all suffered massive destruction during the two recent wars. At Grozny's Hospital N<sup>o</sup>9, for example, the main building is riddled with holes from artillery fire. The patients cram into the corridors of this building, which has been repaired with the meagre resources available. Only one maternity hospital is still functioning in the capital of the Chechen republic.

In the entire republic, 10 hospitals (including the Vedeno central district hospital) and 11 dispensaries were completely destroyed during the bombings between late 1999 and mid-2000. Many other structures suffered extensive damages. Moreover, at least three health structures - among them the Shatoi hospital - are still occupied by the Russian military. There is only one surgical facility left in the entire south of the republic. Persons who need to be operated on must travel long distances and pass through numerous military checkpoints.

Although the wounded continue to make up the majority of those receiving surgical treatment, the hospitals lack the resources to take care of these patients. There is no heating, no electricity, not enough anesthetics...

In May the Russian government paid one or two months' wages to the medical staff, for the first time in five years. Since then, they have received no money. Even the hospitals in Stari Atagi and Grozny, which have been inside Russian-controlled zones for months, are still suffering from a severe shortage of medicines and medical equipment.

*«We are getting an average of 15 severely ill patients every day. I would say that about one third of these should be hospitalised. But we can't do this. We just don't have the necessary conditions here. We don't have the beds. We don't have the rooms. We don't even have any toilets. It's almost the end of October and we don't have any heat...»*

- Surgeon, Grozny

#### Many of the sick and wounded never reach the hospital

Imran, a 27 year-old man and father of two children, stepped on a mine while cutting hay. His left leg was completely blown off, the other badly injured by shrapnel. When his neighbors tried to take him to the hospital, they were blocked by a Russian army checkpoint. Imran spent an entire night losing blood, without medical attention or any drugs to ease the pain. When he finally made it to the Stari Atagi hospital the next day, the doctors could do little except amputate his leg.

The accounts gathered by MSF teams over recent weeks all relate similar incidents at army checkpoints: sick or wounded people needing emergency care; pregnant women suffering from complications forbidden to pass... As a result, the wounded die from lack of care. Many women now give birth outside hospitals. Before the war, the maternity hospital in Grozny had a 60-bed capacity, where in October, only 25 women are admitted.

At night, passing through checkpoints becomes even more uncertain and dangerous for the wounded.

*«After dark it's impossible to move around – even for the medical staff or to get patients to the hospital. Just the other day a local elder was shot. For over two hours we couldn't get him to the hospital. It was only early evening when he was shot, but we needed to negotiate with the command post and the checkpoints. When we finally arrived, we couldn't save him».*

- Doctor, Grozny

On several occasions, doctors and surgeons interviewed noted that victims of abuses are too scared to go to the hospital to receive care. The hospitals are not safe havens, and are either occupied or surrounded by the military. Doctors themselves are subjected to arbitrary restrictions by Russian soldiers in their movements and their daily, medical activities. Many have no choice but to treat patients that come to their homes. In doing so, however, they risk being suspected of helping the rebel forces.

*«Two doctors from the hospital were arrested and spent time at the command post. In one of the doctor's house, they found an electrocardiograph during a 'zachistka' about a month ago. He has been working for 30 years as a cardiologist. He is over 60 years old. They accused him of treating the fighters. He spent a night in a pit».*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District

*Even though I'm not working now, people still come to my home. Especially at night, if there's a pregnancy with complications, they come and see me because they can't get to the hospital. I do what I can, but sometimes nothing can be done (...). Just recently, in early September, there was a woman whom I couldn't save.*

- Obstetrician, Urus Martan District

### Severely limited humanitarian assistance

The terror imposed on the civilian population has certainly had an impact on humanitarian aid. Due to insecurity, today only a handful of NGOs are working in Chechnya with limited resources. Relief teams are based in the neighboring republic of Ingushetia and make daily trips into Chechnya but avoid staying there overnight. The amount of time they can spend with local personnel and patients in the health structures is thus very limited and is dependent on the good will of the Russian forces to allow humanitarian workers to pass through military checkpoints.

The Russian authorities do not openly prevent humanitarian organizations from working, but relief workers regularly encounter problems when trying to obtain or renew passes, which are themselves sometimes refused at military checkpoints. They face the burden of bureaucratic red tape, and access remains sporadic.

### **Conclusion**

The war in Chechnya has now gone on for more than a year. The massive bombing campaign has given way to a climate of terror and to arbitrary violence, which today constitute the reality of daily life for civilians living inside the Chechen Republic, trapping them in a deadly confrontation with the Russian army. These military operations and acts of violence committed against individuals are like a collective punishment, which turns each and every civilian into a suspect and a potential victim. This unrelenting terror is compounded by the highly precarious living conditions of those living in Chechnya and by their massive humanitarian needs, to which nobody is yet responding.

These acts of violence against civilians have not given rise to any opposition on the part of member states of the Council of Europe, or indeed on the part of any other state. This lack of response indicates that states are content to accept the present situation, thereby

preventing a civilian population from enjoying the protection to which it is entitled under humanitarian law.

The only international body to have taken any concrete measures is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, with its decision to suspend the voting rights of the Russian parliamentary delegation. We are forced to acknowledge, however, that none of the recent demands, resolutions and recommendations of the Assembly have had any effect - notably those related to the protection of civilians and to their freedom of movement.

It is for this reason that Médecins Sans Frontières, invited to address this meeting of the Council of Europe's Political Affairs Committee as witnesses, would like to make the following statement:

- The war in Chechnya continues. Civilians are victims of massive acts of aggression, and are subjected to a policy of terror. Their basic human rights - and primarily their freedom of movement - are being flouted. As a result, civilians are denied access even to the little assistance that remains.

- Médecins sans Frontières calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to raise the suffering of Chechnya with the relevant international bodies - in particular the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Security Council - so that they take on their roles and responsibilities.



## WITNESS ACCOUNTS GATHERED BETWEEN AUGUST AND NOVEMBER, 2000 by Médecins Sans Frontières teams

### Civilians subjected to the indiscriminate violence of Russian forces

*«At the beginning of September some of the villagers who live along the main road came back to look at their house. There was a lot of bombing here. They came back just to see what condition the house was in. They were sitting in the car in front of the house when some army vehicles came down the road. One of tanks rolled right over the car. There were three women in the car when it happened. I came after it happened, but I saw the tank. Two of the women were lying next to the car. They were already dead. One of the women was still alive. They took her to Hospital No. 9, but she died there. They came to investigate, but nothing happened.»*

- Resident of Prigorodnoe, 43 years old.

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*«Last October 15<sup>th</sup>, we admitted a patient. A man who was walking along the road, holding his three year old son in his arms. He was hit in the abdomen. Because of this wound, we had to remove his kidney. We think that the soldiers became nervous and began shooting.»*

A surgeon, Argun

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*«On October 21, I drove from my house to the administration buildings in the center of town. On my way to Chernorechie, there were two young girls looking for a ride. I picked them up and they both got in the back seat. In the Zavodskoye District there was a military column coming the other way. I pulled over to the side because sometimes they get angry if you get in their way. They were already past me, but just before I started driving away, I heard an explosion and the girls in the back seat started to scream. I asked them what had happened and I saw that there was a hole in my back window. I only realized I was shot when I felt the blood on my shoulder. They took one bullet out of my shoulder. Another piece of a bullet was lodged in my hat. »*

*A Russian officer in a very clean uniform came up to me right after I was shot. He wrote down my name and then he drove off. He didn't even offer to help. After a little while there was an ambulance that drove by. We flagged it down and it took me to City Hospital No. 9. I think the officer was from the prosecutor's office. He said that I was wounded by a mine. That's ridiculous, I told him. A mine would have blown up my whole car. Anyway, how could they take a bullet out of my shoulder if I was wounded by a mine?»*

- Resident of Aldi, 69 years old.

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*«I live at the edge of the town of Argun, but I was born in the town of Avturi. My brothers are still living there. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, I went to visit my brother there. About two kilometers from the village there is a Russian army outpost. I remember that on that evening my brother complained that it was impossible to live in Avturi because of the constant danger that this unit presented. He said that they get drunk every night and shoot everywhere. After sitting with my brother I went home with a friend. It was about 8 o'clock in the evening. That evening, as usual, the federals started to shoot. I was unlucky in that I had stayed too long at my brother's and I didn't make it home by the time they started shooting. We started walking quickly, hoping the shots wouldn't hit us. I thought that they were mostly firing in the air. All of sudden I felt something warm on my legs. It was blood. I had been hit in my right*

thigh.»

«The federals themselves who are shooting at us, they say that people are shooting at them from our direction. But this is impossible. Here there are only civilians. Who is going to shoot from his own house, where his family is living? Next to us there is a railway lined with posts. The bullets ricochet off the posts into our house. In the evening we try not to go into the rooms which are on the side of the shooting. When they come onto our street, we try not to go outside of the gate...»

- Resident of Argun.

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«During the day it's quiet here, but at night it's terrifying. There is a post on the main road right above the village. They get drunk and shoot all night. Just last week two armored vehicles came into the village at night. My husband ran out of the house and hid. They were screaming: «Kill him! Kill him!» They were shooting right into our house. How can I live here with my children? After that I went back to my home village. I'm from there. Almost every night I have to bring my children down to the basement because of the shooting. They are all sick now, coughing all the time. And they are scared».

- Resident of Prigorodnoe, 43 years old.

### **Arrests and Torture**

«It's dangerous for people just to move around. There were two men from [a nearby village]. They were arrested on the road near the village in the beginning of September. One of them I know. He is a year or two older than me – so he's in his late forties. The other is in his thirties. They said they had been taken to Tangi Chu and then to the Urus Martan boarding school.

I was called to see them after they were released. Almost everyone held in these places said they had been beaten – with rifle butts, with fists and feet. They both had black and blue marks all over the backs and legs. Both had broken ribs, and one also had signs of subcutaneous emphysema. The also said they had given them electric shocks to their hands. Both of them had burns under their fingernails.

They didn't want to go to a hospital. People who go through this are scared to talk about it. They're scared that they will end up back there again.»

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (1)

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«In the past two months, we've been seeing a lot of people who were previously arrested. They suffer from multiple injuries. Fractures, head injuries. Some of them tell me how they were treated. Several said they had put some kind of metal wires over them and shocked them with electricity. They are so scared that most of them come out not talking. They try not to come to the hospital, because we register them. None of them file any complaints. They don't want to go through that hell again. In our report, we put down that the cause of injuries was beating by the federals, but they never come to ask what happened - not the prosecutors, not the military.»

- Doctor, Urus Martan District.(2)

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«I have seen lots of cases of people who were severely beaten. It's very common for people to be picked up by the federals for any reason. Most are severely beaten when they are arrested. But these people are too scared to complain. Most of them are happy to get out

*alive. They won't do anything that could risk another arrest. Even the doctors are very reluctant to write reports on people who have been released with wounds.*

*I've examined a lot of people without making an official report. I recently examined a man in my neighborhood who had been held in Khankala [the main Russian military base in Chechnya]. He had cigarette burns on his body and behind his ears. Like most he was too scared to make an official complaint.*

*The situation is driving people to desperation. The way the federals treat us – it makes people feel like they are trapped in a corner.»*

- Doctor, Grozny.

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*«There were 202 people arrested here just in the last month. Three of them still haven't been found. We don't know if they are dead or still being held somewhere. All of the rest were released after a few days. Either their relatives paid to get them out or they were released just like that. When they come out they tell horror stories. Beatings, threats, everything. Most of them are held here in Urus Martan or in Tangi Chu. I have examined several with broken ribs, broken arms, some with contusions (bruises) on their bodies and skull traumas.»*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District.(3)

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*«It's impossible to live here. They arrest people all over the place – for no reason. For young men, it's dangerous to be anywhere on the street. They pick them up and take them to the command post. They beat them. They do whatever they want with them.*

*I have seen at least 40 patients who have been beaten up there. Some of them were held [in the detention center in the village] and some right here in [the local army headquarters]. Most of them don't even come into the hospital. I've seen broken ribs. All of them have been beaten. Mostly not on the face, but on the body. One had a broken jaw. When they come here, they are terrified. I have one boy who came in two days ago. He is still unconscious with head injuries.*

*I have seen a lot them with burn marks on their bodies. Usually on the back or on the chest. In some cases there were electric burns. They tell me what happened to them. They said they take two wires and put them together on their skin. You can also tell by the marks on their bodies. There is small burnt point, surrounded by a black and blue mark.*

*Most of them are picked up for no reason: something is wrong with their papers, or some of them were just hanging out in the streets with other guys.*

*I know about how people are treated not only because the patients tell me. I've been through this hell myself. Back in the last winter, I was picked up. They led me to a pit less than 2 meters deep. One of them beat me with a pole. I spent all night in the cold in the pit.»*

- Surgeon, Urus Martan District.

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*«I live in Grozny with my family. On November 12<sup>th</sup> I awoke to a lot of screaming. I looked out the window and saw the back courtyard filled with soldiers, their guns raised as if taking aim. I thought it was just a regular 'zachistka', so I told my eldest sons to get their documents ready. I returned to the window and saw the soldiers kicking a young man who was lying prostrate on the ground. My brother lives on the first floor, I was very worried about him, and I wanted to go down to check he was all right. I opened the door and tried to make my way down the stairs. The second floor was filled with soldiers and they screamed at me to go back to my apartment. They were dragging a man by the feet down the stairs.*

*His face was burnt black. I headed back to my room. The soldiers followed. They ordered my children up against the wall. They were barking orders and threatening us. The soldiers ransacked the room, riffled through books, turned over the tables, searched under the bed mattresses. They found a black leather belt. They said it was a military belt. «Where did you get this?» I didn't know, I didn't know what to say. They said I was lying. «What are your boys doing?» they said. 'We'll teach you how to study, we'll finish your education». They asked if there was another way out of the apartment, I said no. They told us to remain inside and they left. My children, especially the younger ones, were terrified. I was so afraid they would take my sons away.»*

- Resident, Grozny.

### **Destroyed Health Structures**

*«In the last few months we have done over 200 major surgeries, despite the conditions here. It's cold. The electricity comes on and off. And recently with all of the 'zachistkas', there have been a lot more wounded coming in. The majority are mine victims. Gunshot wounds are also common.»*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District.(2)

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*«I have 25 women in the maternity ward today. It is a 60-bed ward. Before it was always over-crowded. Now who can stay there? It's too cold and we don't have the conditions to keep people here.»*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (2)

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*«We are by far the biggest hospital working in Chechnya now. Whenever there are blasts or large numbers of wounded, they bring them first to us.*

*We are getting an average of 15 severely ill patients every day. I would say that about one third of these should be hospitalized. But we can't do this. We just don't have the necessary conditions here. We don't have the beds. We don't have the rooms. We don't even have any toilets.*

*It's almost the end of October and we don't have any heat except in the new trauma ward. We also have about 175 outpatients every day. Some of these are also serious cases needing in-patient care».*

- Surgeon, Grozny.

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*«When there was the blast last week, 21 people with severe injuries were brought here – people with multiple and complex trauma. The blast happened right near Hospital N° 2, but that was bombed to hell, so they all came here.*

*Eight of the wounded needed immediate abdominal or thoracic surgery with general anaesthesia. But we already had an operation under way when they were brought in. We only have two operating tables with anaesthetic equipment. Seven of the eight patients who needed urgent and major surgery died.*

*We are always short of medicines. It's October and we have received almost nothing from Russia or from the Ministry of Health. We survived on the drugs provided by international agencies.»*

- Surgeon, Grozny.

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*«The doctors here have been wonderful, but look at the conditions they are working in. Everything is broken here. There is no heat. There is no food except what your relatives bring you. There is nothing».*

- Resident of Aldi, 69 years old

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*«The worst is the shooting that happens almost every night around the checkpoint. They just did some repairs on the hospital. They painted the outside, put in windows and repaired the roof. Now look at it. Half of the windows on that side [towards the checkpoint] are shattered. There are bullet holes all over the side of the building.»*

- General practitioner, Urus Martan District.

### **Obstacles to seeking medical care**

*«On October 1<sup>st</sup> I went to my brother's house. Then I went home with a friend. It was about 8 o'clock in the evening. And that night, as usual, the federals started to shoot. I was unlucky in that I had stayed too long at my brother's, and I didn't make it home by the time they started shooting. We walked quickly, hoping that the shots wouldn't hit us. I thought they were mostly firing in the air. All of a sudden I felt something warm on my legs. It was blood. I had been hit in my right thigh. My friend ran to find a car. But it was already past curfew, and at the checkpoint at the edge of Avturi they wouldn't let us through - even though they saw there was a wounded person in the truck.*

*I returned to Avturi. I stayed in my brother's house while my friend and some people whom he had asked to help went to the head of the village administration. They explained to him what had happened, and they came back to get me. The head of the administration was supposed to contact the checkpoint by radio. He started negotiating. The federals at the post were drunk, and it was very difficult to come to an agreement with them. It took them four hours to agree.*

*During all of this time I was losing blood. In the end, they [at the checkpoint] agreed to let us through. It was almost 2 o'clock when we finally got to Shali. There they gave me first-aid, but they couldn't operate because there was no electricity. In the morning, they took me by ambulance to Argun. There they operated on me.»*

- Resident of Argun.

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*«I worked before the war in the Maternity Hospital N°1 in Grozny - everybody calls it the Central Maternity Hospital. I worked there until the end of October when everything was destroyed. I was supposed to go back to work this month, but it's still difficult to travel. It's still dangerous.*

*Even though I'm not working now, people still come to my home. Especially at night, if there's a pregnancy with complications, they come and see me because they can't get to the hospital. I do what I can, but sometimes nothing can be done. They need to be in a hospital but they can't get there. People go to the local Russian checkpoint for help to access the hospital, but often they don't do anything. Unless the soldiers radio ahead [to the next checkpoint] or escort you it is suicidal to try to get to the hospital at night. They will open fire at you before you even approach the checkpoint.*

*Just recently, in early September, there was a woman whom I couldn't save. She arrived at 1 o'clock in the morning. I knew her. She was in her 35<sup>th</sup> or 36<sup>th</sup> week, and she had been vomiting and suffering from nausea. By the evening her condition had become much worse.*

*Her family took her to the Russian checkpoint. A doctor there has often been helpful. But this time, when the family asked for help in getting to the hospital, the soldiers refused.*

*When they came to see me she had dangerously high blood pressure, eclampsia and a partial separation of the placenta. I gave her some medicines to lower the blood pressure but there was nothing else I could do. By early morning she gave birth to twins, but both were born dead. I told her family that she needed to go to the hospital immediately. Her relatives went again to the Russian checkpoint in town, but by then it was too late. She died before they could get there.*

*This is not the first time people come to see me at night. They're just too scared to try passing the checkpoints. Anything can happen.*

*This isn't a hospital. I have nothing here but a few medicines. Often there is nothing you can do but sit with them until the morning and hope the checkpoints will then re-open.*

- Obstetrician, Urus Martan District.

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*«Births are the most dangerous problem. There is very little pre-natal care now. Our women wait until there is a crisis to go to the hospital. But who is going to risk travelling at night? It's too dangerous. Almost all our births used to occur in hospitals. Now women everywhere are giving birth at home.*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (2)

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*«The checkpoints make people's lives impossible. A man here fell off his roof. I was worried that he had broken his spine. I, myself, went to the checkpoint to bring him to the hospital for an X-ray. But they wouldn't let us through. They said the town was closed for a 'zachistka'. They wouldn't take any arguments. We had to treat him without a diagnosis.*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (2)

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*«This is a very good hospital. It suffered now because it is right next to the checkpoint. We would have a lot more patients but people are scared to come because of the checkpoint. They would rather be seen at home. We should have in-patient services here but we can't because of the checkpoint. At night no one can come here, even if it's an emergency. You try no to even leave your house after dark».*

- General practitioner, Urus Martan District.

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*«After dark it's impossible to move around – even for the medical staff or to get patients to the hospital. Just the other day a local elder was shot. For over two hours we couldn't get him to the hospital. It was only early evening when he was shot, but we needed to negotiate with the command post and the checkpoints. When we finally arrived, we couldn't save him».*

*«They call me when someone is wounded or sick and then I have to get into these tedious negotiations. This is my job now, I'm no longer a doctor.*

*I asked the local commander how to handle this, and now we have procedures for taking patients through the checkpoints. But it never works as smoothly as it looks on paper. He also said that he can't be responsible for the posts outside the village. No one is accountable. No one can give any guarantees».*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (2)

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*«People come to me because the road to [the district center] is often closed so people can't get to the hospital. A lot of people are just afraid to go to the hospital because they don't want to be registered. It's mostly people who were arrested».*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District.(3)

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*«Two doctors from the hospital were arrested and spent time at the command post. In one of the doctor's house they found an electro-cardiograph machine during a 'zachistka' about a month ago. He has been working for 30 years as a cardiologist. He is over 61 years old. They accused him of treating the fighters. He spent a night in a pit.*

*During the fighting all the doctors took equipment and instruments into their homes so they wouldn't be stolen. That's the only way we've been able to keep some of our inventory. But every time the federals find some of this, it's a problem. I have to explain that it's the hospital's materials. They always accuse us of running an underground hospital for the rebels. Sometimes the equipment is never returned.*

*Anyway, there shouldn't be any question about treating rebels. We've treated plenty of soldiers here as well. It's not our business to be asking people questions before we treat them. The hospital staff put up with this treatment with clenched teeth. But to be honest, everybody's patience is wearing thin.*

- Doctor, Urus Martan District. (2)

## MSF IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

- **In Ingushetia**, where there are 150,000 displaced Chechens, MSF is supplying hospitals and clinics with drugs and medical materials. In the north-west of the republic, mobile clinics are offering basic medical care. In the hospital of Nazran, the capital, an MSF doctor is making sure that patients receive treatment despite their lack of financial means. Teams distribute relief items to some 40,000 displaced persons: hygiene kits, blankets, cooking sets.
- **In Chechnya**, MSF is assisting some 30 medical structures throughout the republic. Teams have also rehabilitated operation rooms in two main hospitals: Stari Atagi and Hospital N°9 in Grozny. Seventeen health structures have benefited from rehabilitation works. MSF also offers support to the maternity in Grozny, the hospital of Cernovodsk (near the Ingush border) and of Chatoi (in the south). Winterization activities have been carried out in 11 hospitals and dispensaries throughout Chechnya. The organization has also rehabilitated collective centers, wagons, and attics where displaced persons have found refuge but live in precarious conditions. The poor level of security prevents teams from being permanently based in Chechnya, and programs are run out of neighboring Ingushetia.
- **In Dagestan**, MSF is distributing basic medical kits to health posts, clinics, and hospitals in three districts.
- **In Georgia**, the program of psychological support to Chechen children in the Pankisi valley has resumed, after an interruption last summer when members of the ICRC were kidnapped. MSF teams take part in medical referrals for Chechen refugees and have rehabilitating collective centers for the winter.