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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2004]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation including the Chechen Republic

Society for Threatened Peoples is concerned about the worsening situation of human rights defenders in the Russian Federation and especially in the Chechen Republic. In the Russian Federation and of course particularly in the Chechen Republic human rights defenders are often the only ones to collect and publish information about human rights abuses. Because of very limited press freedom in Russia and the absence of any means to publish the truth about human rights violations in the Chechen Republic the international public depends on the work of human rights defenders. In May 2003 Zura Bitieva, former prisoner of the notorious Chernokosovo Filtration Camp and human rights defender was murdered by death squadrons. On January 10th 2004, at around 10:15 p.m., members of the armed forces of the Russian Federation kidnapped Mr. Aslan Sheripovich Davletukaev, a volunteer of the human rights organisation "Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship". In the morning of January 16, 2004, an inspection unit of the Russian army found Mr. Davletukaev's body near a highway in Gudermes town. His body bore evidence of torture and mutilation. His arms and legs were broken, and some parts of his body were punctured by a sharp metal object. His death was the result of a bullet wound in the back of his head. Other human rights defenders work and live under constant threat and fear. The prominent Chechen human rights defender and winner of the Swiss Award for Freedom and Human Rights in 2002, Mrs. Zainap Gashaeva, was threatened in front of the UN Human Rights Committee in November 2003 by Mr. Abdul-Hakim Sultygov, then responsible for human rights in the Chechen Republic appointed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Of particular concern in 2003 was the situation of the non-governmental human rights organization "Soldiers' Mothers of Saint Petersburg". The activities of this organisation are unsettling for the senior representatives of the Russian Army for obvious reasons: over the period 1 January 2003 to June 2003 alone, the organisation was contacted by 307 soldiers, among whom 241 complained of the forced conscription of sick children, 113 of torture, 40 of extortion, 35 of psychological pressure and 14 of slave labour for officers' personal needs. In mid January 2003, 24 soldiers deserted the army and contacted Soldiers' Mothers, claiming they had been tortured. Following this a whole series of repressions took place stretching over roughly half a year. Investigations have been taken up and the organisation was threatened by the information that the Ministry of Justice planned to put up a hotel in the building where their organisation rents office space. In September three unknown men, who tore the signs of peaceful demonstrators and hardly beat up one of them, attacked the weekly picket line of Soldiers' Mothers on the main street of Saint Petersburg to protest against the war in Chechen Republic.

On 14 August 2003 the office and staff of the human rights organisation Memorial Saint Petersburg was attacked. According to the information received, a young man arrived at the Memorial office, allegedly looking for those in charge of the anti-fascist commission. The anti-fascist commission staff not being available, the man was advised to return later. The man came back accompanied with another man. The two men threatened a staff member with hammers, tore off the telephone, gagged her and tied up her hands. She was then locked up in a closet. They then seized the Chairman's laptop computer and his mobile phone. He and three more staff members were gagged and also locked up on a closet. The Memorial staff was released later on that day, after a visitor called the police.

Society for Threatened Peoples is extremely concerned about the security situation of human rights defenders in Russia and especially in the Chechen Republic. Therefore Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to pressure the government of the Russian Federation on:

- complying with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human rights defenders, in particular article 1, which states that “everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”,
- investigating fairly and impartially into crimes against human rights defenders,
- opening the Chechen Republic for international journalists and human rights experts.
