

Hon. Richard Armitage
Deputy Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Honorable Richard Armitage,

I write to you concerning the appeal filed in May 2004 by the Department of Homeland Security against the ruling of the U.S. Immigration Court granting asylum to Mr. Ilyas Akhmadov. The appeal is based on the allegation that Mr. Akhmadov has “furthered acts of terrorism and persecution”. We consider these accusations to be not just baseless, but indeed devoid of any credibility. On the contrary, Mr. Akhmadov, who has lived abroad for years, has been a tireless advocate of a peaceful solution to the war in Chechnya and has routinely denounced all acts of terrorism. This has been effectively demonstrated during his asylum trial. We are concerned that the appeal by the Department of Homeland Security is the result of a campaign by the Russian government to portray all members of the Chechen resistance (who until 1999 were recognized as legitimate partners by Russia!) as terrorists, regardless of their actual record, in order to create the impression that the war in Chechnya is indeed part of the international war on terrorism.

Mr. Akhmadov’s dedicated campaign for peace and a negotiated solution to the war in his homeland, and his outspoken denunciation of terrorism and bloodshed have earned him the friendship and admiration of many Americans, among them Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and former Secretaries of State Alexander Haig and Madeleine Albright. Ilyas Akhmadov has already been in legal limbo for two years, prohibiting him from seeing his family during this time. He now has to expect an indefinite extension of this state and the very real possibility of being extradited to Russia, where he faces a politicized trial that will hardly be fair as well as the threat of torture.

As Americans, we are concerned that the United States ranks the wishes of the Russian government higher than our obligation to protect those threatened by political persecution. We urge you to convince your colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security to retract this appeal. By denying asylum to Ilyas Akhmadov nothing will be gained in terms of security for this country; by upholding the Immigration court’s ruling and allowing Mr. Akhmadov to stay, the United States will set an important signal for the majority of Chechens, who abhor terrorism and desire peace.

Respectfully,