

THE SOCIETY FOR THE RUSSIAN-CHECHEN FRIENDSHIP

THE BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ACTIVITIES.

The interregional nongovernmental organization “The Society for the Russian-Chechen Friendship”.

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The organization was established on April 17, 2000 at the conference held in Nizhny Novgorod. Delegates from the Chechen Republic, Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod participated in the conference. Actually the organization started its work since 1999 when human rights activists from Nizhny Novgorod and Chechen anti-war activists living in Ingushetia and in Chechnya initiated its establishment after the second war started in the North Caucasus. There are regional branches and working groups in Nizhny Novgorod, the Chechen Republic, Ingushetia and Moscow. The organization is registered at Main Board of Justice on June 21, 2000 (1 3336).

The leading organ of the organization for the period between the conferences is the Council of the society. It consists of five people. The activities are coordinated by two co-chairmen from the Russian and the Chechen sides.

The main lines of work:

The humanitarian activity and folk diplomacy

Assistance to forced migrants from the Chechen Republic, participation in the establishment of the infrastructure of places of accommodation for refugees in Ingushetia

In October 1999 - July 2000 the SRCF organized evacuation of some 200 refugees from the zones of war actions in the Chechen republic to Ingushetia. They used their private transport to do it.

In October - November 1999 members of the SRCF (Imran Ezhev, Minkail Ezhev and others) established the first tent settlement for refugees in Ingushetia in Yandare village. A number of international humanitarian organizations assisted them in this work. 2700 forced migrants were accommodated there from the end of 1999 till the beginning of 2000. In 1999-2002 Imran Ezhev was the commandant of this tent settlement. In the end of 2000 the SRCF built new living quarters for refugees and put tents for 1200 people with the assistance of the "Islamic Relief" organization. In November 1999 the SRCF together with the Ministry of Education of the Ingush Republic established a tent school for 430 pupils with the teaching staff of thirty people. The school was supported by the SRCF up to January 2002 when it got patronage of the Center of Peacebuilding and Social Development (The Great Britain). Since summer 2003, the SRCF has been running one more temporary accommodation station – "Motherland 1" tent camp in Karabulak town.

Since autumn 1999 the chairman of the regional branch of the SRCF in Ingushetia Imran Ezhev has been taking active part in the work of the Regional Service on the Reception and Accommodation of refugees in Ingushetia at the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Ingush Republic. This structure established such refugee settlements as "Alina", "Bella", "Satsita" and "Sputnik" on the eve of winter 2000-2001 on the recommendation of the SRCF. Some of them keep functioning until now.

Several thousands refugees from Chechnya were accommodated in the private sectors of different settlements all over Ingushetia as a result of constant negotiations of the SRCF members with the elders and representatives of the Muslim clergy.

Thanks to the interference of the SRCF the conflicts between the local people and refugees have been prevented and stopped more than once. For instance, accidents that happened in November 2000, February 2001 in "Satsita" and "Sputnik" settlements, in Gazi-Yurt village, in March 2001 in Nasyr-Kort village of Nasran town, in July 2000 in Yandare village, in May 2002 in Karabulak town and many others.

If people are in need of assistance in organization of funeral ceremonies, they are provided with such help free of charge.

Humanitarian Aid to Refugees in Ingushetia

The Aid to the Ill and Disabled

Since October 1999 the SRCF has been organizing humanitarian activities and providing wounded and injured people with the medical help. The SRCF organizes

evacuation of the injured people to Ingushetia and other republics of the North Caucasus. The SRCF assists in providing assistance with prosthesis and purchasing of wheelchairs.

Medical and Rehabilitation Programs for Children from the Chechen Republic

From August 9 to August 26, 2000 the SRCF held the action "A Big City to Little Highlanders" in Nizhny Novgorod region. Within the frame of this program 23 children from Chechnya and refugee settlements in Ingushetia had rest and underwent the course of medical treatment in Nizhny Novgorod. There were children from the families that had suffered most of all. For example, the brothers and sisters of Kheda Kungaeva, an eighteen-year-old girl who had been killed at night from March 25 to 26, 2000 by Colonel of the Russian army Yury Budanov.

In October-December 2000 the SRCF together with the Nizhny Novgorod Center of the Assistance to Migrants held the action "A Smile of a Child against a War". Within the frame of this program ten children from the Chechen Republic aged from 4 to 15 underwent the course of medical treatment in Nizhny Novgorod region.

From May to July 2001 the third group of children from Achkhoy-Martan district of the Chechen Republic arrived in Nizhny Novgorod. There were 27 children in it. All of them were partial or full orphans. Their illnesses were diagnosed in Nizhny Novgorod Region Hospital for Children and then they were sent to different resorts of Nizhny Novgorod region in accordance with their illnesses. The action was also held by the Nizhny Novgorod Center of the Assistance to Migrants in cooperation with the Society for the Russian-Chechen Friendship.

In November 2003 the SRCF brought a group of ten children (aged from seven to thirteen) to Nizhny Novgorod. All of them are pupils of the republican school for deaf children that is situated in Grozny. The children were received by the non-governmental rehabilitation school for disabled children "NORDIS" situated in Nizhny Novgorod. The children were examined by specialists in Nizhny Novgorod for the first time in their life. This program was continued in March 2004 by the SRCF in cooperation with "NORDIS" rehabilitation school with the same group of children. This time all of them were provided with hearing aids and the children got the opportunity to visit theatres, cinemas and communicate with children from Nizhny Novgorod. Both stages of this program were financially backed by a Moscow entrepreneur Khusain Jabrailov.

At present, the SRCF is assisting the teaching staff, pupils and their parents of the republican boarding school for deaf children in their attempts as they are threatened with the danger of being evicted from the house the Chechen Ministry

of Education has been renting for them. The owner of the building the school has to rent warned its head teacher that they would quit the building in May 2004.

The republican boarding school for deaf children has to rent a private house in Grozny situated in 33 Alexander Nevsky Street. The building that had belonged to the school before the armed conflict broke out was hardly damaged. It consists of a school, dormitory and a canteen. But in January 2000 after it had been repaired the Khanty-Mansi OMON seized the building. The temporary police department of Oktyabrsky district of Grozny was dislocated there. It was the place where dreadful crimes were committed by policemen from Siberia. The truth about them was revealed to the public by articles in "Novaya Gazeta" and some other independent Russian mass media. At present one of the Interior Affairs Ministry ex-officers from Nizhnevartovsk Sergey Lapin is standing trial for an abduction and tortures in Grozny. But the investigation of that crime was very complicated as representatives of the public prosecutor's office were not allowed to examine the place where the crime was committed. After the temporary police offices, where police officers from different regions of the Russian Federation were attached to, had merged with the district police offices, the boarding school building was seized by the police unit from Yaroslavl supposedly. Now they are protecting themselves and the building where there must be a lot of evidence to the committed crimes by policemen from Khanty-Mansy region.

Meanwhile, the boarding school for deaf children has had to change three addresses from 2000. Sixty seven pupils are attending classes at the school now. But not all of them are able to go to school every day as they live in different villages. The way from villages to Grozny and then back is rather dangerous. Besides, parents have to pay the fee for them and for their children. Many of parents cannot overcome this obstacle, as they just aren't able to afford it. The pedagogical staff of the school is doing their best to teach the children to speak. However, very little depends on their eagerness and working skills due to the present circumstances. The school is short of equipment and well-qualified staff. There is no doctor in the staff. The Red Cross used to provide the deaf children from Grozny with food. At present, their food program has been discontinued. Therefore, this international organization isn't able to help them any longer.

There are more six hundred deaf children and children with limitations in hearing in the republic. It is impossible to establish the precise number of children with limitations in hearing who live in the Chechen Republic because no medical examination is held at schools. If such a child does not go to school, medical and social workers just lose any track of them.

The pupils of the school, their parents and the teaching staff are in panic now. If the owner of the house takes it from them, they will have nowhere to go. They are offered to buy the house from its owner as a solution to the problem. Nevertheless, it can be hardly regarded as the final solution to the problem as even if they

manage to collect the necessary money, it will be impossible to organize proper studies there because there is too little space.

The teachers of the boarding school are insisting that the school building must be returned to the children. The governing body of the boarding school has brought a court action demanding to move the police unit from the school building. But it is hardly possible to hope that the children and their teachers will obtain justice in the nearest future as all the judges in Chechnya are intimidated and the police officers have no power to withstand the military.

Besides, the SRCF organized a contest of children's drawings "Give Me Peace Back" devoted to the Chechen tragedy in three schools on Nizhny Novgorod within the joint project of the Yalta Initiative for Peace in Chechnya. This is a coalition of Russian and Chechen non-governmental organizations created in 2002 with the aim to promote ideas of the peaceful reconciliation of the Russian-Chechen armed conflict. 13-year-old Irina Andreeva from Nizhniy Novgorod school¹ 14 became one of the prize-winners of the contest and she participated in the final exhibition of the contest that was held in Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow in March 2004.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING PEOPLE, ASSISTANCE TO THE RELEASE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ARBITRARILY DETAINED

The SRCF has been holding active search for the missing and people who are arbitrarily detained by representatives of the Russian force structures. The SRCF participated in actions aimed at releasing some hundreds citizens of the Chechen Republic who were arrested without any reasons.

In October- December 2000 the regional branch of the Society in the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia assisted mothers of the two soldiers taken captive in their search for their children. Elena Arefyeva (Bor town of Nizhny Novgorod region) and Maria Chernikova (Voronezh city) lived in the office of the Society in Karabulak. Members of the Society accompanied the women to Chechnya more than once. Alexander Chernikov was freed.

INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITY.

The information blockade created by Russian government also makes it virtually impossible for local Chechens to access independent information on Chechnya form media. Though few independent Russian media agencies publish the information free from governmental propaganda, the newspaper of the Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship (SRCF) remains the main source of independent and impartial information available in Chechnya itself. We consider the recommencement of the "Groznsky Rabochy" very important and positive fact.

But they have to self-sensor their publications as the editing house is located in area close to the conflict zone and they have to take this fact into consideration.

During the past three years the SRCF has created the network of volunteers in Chechnya, who provide the up-to-date information on human rights violations committed by the federal troops. The SRCF has got the trustworthy reputation among local population that makes it possible for the Society' s correspondents to carry out effective journalist investigations. Besides, for the last year the issues covered by our correspondents have included not only cases of human rights violations, war crimes and information from the areas of the on-going local combats, but also information on humanitarian and cultural matters.

The collected information is passed to leading information agencies in form of press-releases and is published on the web-site of the SRCF. Providing independent information on Chechnya, the Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship makes a concrete contribution to Russian democracy by promoting balanced coverage of one of the most important issues in Russia today.

Project objectives.

The project sets the following objectives:

- i. To collect and distribute timely, accurate and unbiased information on the armed conflict in Chechnya, with particular emphasis on human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- ii. To promote cooperation between Russians and Chechens in providing information about Chechnya.
- iii. To dispel the atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion between Chechens and Russians which has resulted from one-sided coverage of the war in Chechnya.

Project activities.

1. Development of the network of volunteers in Chechnya for collection of information and distribution of newspaper of the SRCF.

In the last year the SRCF has created the network of volunteers in Chechnya, who collect information and pass it to the correspondents of the SRCF. This network constantly grows and at the moment this network consists of about 40 people. These people also distribute the newspaper of the SRCF in Chechnya. The SRCF will make efforts to further increase the number of volunteers, as they form the vital component of the project.

2. Development of the correspondent's network for transfer of information from Chechnya to Ingushetia office of the SRCF.

For the last two year SRCF has employed 6 correspondents, 3 resided in Chechnya and 3 in Ingushetia, who collected information from volunteers, verified it and transferred it to the office in Ingushetia. However, that system of information transfer was not efficient enough, sometimes leads to delays up to 10-14 days, partly due to budgetary constrains that did not allow for correspondents to travel frequently between Chechnya and Ingushetia.

For the last two years the SRCF has managed to shorten the period between the time of an accident and its coverage in a press release. Now the information can be delayed up to 5 days only and it happens more and more often the information about the event is transferred on the day of its occurrence. It's very important for those media agencies that work in the daily format.

Besides, the volume of the information connected with the war conflict in the Chechen Republic from both Chechnya and Ingushetia, as well as from other regions of the Russian Federation has increased a lot. That is why we think it necessary to separate the duties of the release editor and the translator that were performed by one person because the payment was extremely low.

We think that our work has improved thanks to the fact the correspondents of the Informational Center of the SRCF has increased their professional level. The increased budget this year will make possible for the correspondents to travel more often and provide information without delays, which will make the press-releases of the SRCF more effective and valuable for media agencies.

3. Publication of the newspaper and its distribution.

The last year experience shows that analytical publications in the newspaper of the SRCF are in very high demand, especially the recently introduced cultural section. Therefore, the volume of the single issue was increased from 8 to 12 pagers, and then it will be further increased to 16 pagers. Due to the increased volume, the functions of press-releases editing and newspaper editing will be separated so that the quality of the newspaper publications will stay at high level.

Facing the difficulties of the newspaper distribution in Chechnya (copies are sent by post to the office in Ingushetia, then transported by the correspondents to Chechnya, distributed by volunteers among the Chechen population and then passed from person to person, sometimes long after the paper was issued), the increase in volume will help to reach wider audience in Chechnya.

In the past year, five thousand copies of each monthly issue of newspaper have been printed; half of them are distributed in Chechnya, half – in Russia through partner human rights organization. These figures will be maintained this year. As previously, the newspaper will be distributed free of charge. But the quantity of

requests from different regions of the Russian Federation has also increased and thus we have to ask for bigger postage financing. In addition, the official level of the postage payment in Russia increased in June, 2003.

Because the situation in Chechnya and neighboring regions remains unstable, the SRCF will continue to publish the newspaper in Nizhny Novgorod. It will reduce the risk of governmental interference and unlawful actions from governmental officials, as well as promote the spirit of cooperation between Russians and Chechens.

4. Development of the web-site and the system of press-releases distribution.

In the last year press-releases were distributed electronically to more than 200 addresses, including national and foreign mass-media, human rights organizations, governmental and intergovernmental agencies.

Press-releases of the SRCF are used from time to time by such newspapers as "The Novaya Gazeta", "The Moscow News", "The Komsomolskaya Pravda", "The Rossiyskaya Gazeta", "The Inostranets", the magazine "Ecology and Law" (Saint-Petersburg), "The Anti-war Bulletin" (Saint-Petersburg), the Paris weekly edition "The Russian Thought", a newspaper published in Netherlands "The Chechen Times" and on its web side: www.chechnya.nl, the Moscow Helsinki Group Bulletin, the Bulletin of the Migration Organizations Forum. On November 28, 2002 the information distributed by the SRCF was used in the article "Russian Forces Begin Evictions of Chechens from Refugee Camp" by Michael Wines that appeared in "The New York Times". Our information has been used by the radio "Liberty" and the Russian branch of the BBC, the radio stations "The Moscow Echo". Leading Russian human rights electronic lists Prima www.prima-news.ru and electronic media agencies www.Grani.ru and the agency of the social information www.asi.org, www.hrights.ru (The Institute of Human Rights), the site The Human Rights in Russia www.hro.org, and the internet-media www.polit.ru, the site of "The Caucasian Knot" www.KavKaz.memo.ru, by other electronic media, with the exception of the state-controlled media and those with negative attitude towards the idea of non-violent resolution of the conflict in Chechnya. The information collected by the SRCF is published on the web sites of organizations Ichkeria.org and Memorial, as well as The Information Agency of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria (www.chechenpress.org).

The system of press-releases distribution will be continued and expanded in the future. Press releases are also published on the web site of the SRCF.

Television Broadcast, Cooperation with Different Mass Media

By the moment of the establishing of the Society two of the people from Nizhny Novgorod, Stanislav Dmitrievsky and Igor Kalyapin had already some experience of work in Chechnya in 1995. That year they represented the newspaper "Pravozaschita" and they went to the areas of the armed conflict twice and took video both on the side of the rebel fighters and on the side of the federal force (Grozny, Achkhoy-Martan, Urus-Martan, Shali, Samashki). All that material was used in different TV programs of Nizhny Novgorod channels.

On the basis of video material one of Nizhny Novgorod TV companies "The Volga" made a film "A Strange War" (directed by Valentina Buzmakova). The film was about the situation with civil population in the zones of the armed conflict. Besides, in April 2001 TV reporters of Nizhny Novgorod TV Company "The Dialogue" Evgenia Sosnina and Dmitry Burlaka participated in the work of the joint group. A number of documentary reports about the victims of tortures were broadcast as a result of that trip.

The SRCF cooperates with a number of Russian and foreign mass media. The Society accompanies journalists in their trips around Chechnya and provides them with the means of transport and organizes their meetings with people who are interesting for them.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITIES

Monitoring of the situation with human rights in Chechnya

In 2000 – 2003 the SRCF participated in the program "Monitoring over human rights in Russia" that is held by Moscow Helsinki Committee in cooperation with different regional organizations. The Society made several annual reports on the situation with human rights in the Chechen Republic.

In April 2001, in August and December 2002 and in September 2003 the SRCF assisted in organizing trips of the president of the International Helsinki Federation Lyudmila Alekseeva to the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia, during which she learnt the actual situation in the region. The SRCF did their best to guarantee safety and protection of L. Alekseeva and the chief of the Moscow bureau of "The Independent" in April 2001.

In August 2002, the SRCF assisted to the work of the Ombudsman in the Russian Federation Oleg Mironov in Chechnya. As a result, 82 people were released.

In September 2003, the Society assisted the Committee on Human Rights at the President of the Russian Federation and its Chairperson Ella Pamfilova in her trips around Ingushetia and Chechnya.

The Law Assistance

In August 2000 Visa Kungaev, the father of Elsa Kungaeva who was killed by Yury Budanov appealed to the Society for the Russian-Chechen Friendship. The Kungaevs family was regularly consulted by the members of the Society and lawyers involved into the investigation. From February 2001 to summer 2002, the cochairman of the Society Stanislav Dmitrievsky participated in the trial as a public prosecutor.

Cooperation with human rights organizations

The SRCF cooperates with a number of Russian, foreign and international human rights organizations. The SRCF has the closest contacts with the MHG, ‘The Memorial’, Human Rights Watch, The International Helsinki Federation, the Danish and Norway Helsinki Committees, the Frontline Foundation (Ireland).

The SRCF joined the international network ‘United’ in November 2003. It has closely cooperated with the OMCT for the last year.

REPRESSIONS AGAINST THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE RUSSIAN – CHECHEN FRIENDSHIP

- ♣ Representatives of the federal forces have committed many crimes in Chechnya against civilians. At the same time, many atrocities have been committed against human rights activists. Thus, between 10 and 16 January 2004 Aslan Davletukaev, a volunteer of the inter-regional public organization "The Society for the Russian-Chechen Friendship", became a victim of the military and police arbitrariness. Aslan Sheripovich Davletukaev was a resident of Avtury village, Shali district of the Chechen Republic. He was born in 1973. His forcible abduction and tortures were prior to the death of an activist of the public organization.

- ♣ On March 15, 2003 at about 07.00 p.m. in the Chechen Republic on the road between the settlements Shali and Serzhen-Yurt of Shali district the head of the regional branch of the Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship, the head of SRCF Information Centre in Northern Caucasus Imran Ezhev was kidnapped, supposedly by federal forces.

According to SRCF correspondent Zaur Saitovich Kharipov (1978) on Saturday 15 March, at about 19.30, Imran Ezhev was driving on the road between Shali and Serzhen Yurt in the Shalinskiy region of Chechnya when two vehicles, a Niva jeep and a Zhiguli, forced his car to make a stop. A group of masked men, who did not identify themselves, came out the

vehicles. They asked to see the identification documents of Mr. Ezhiev and his driver, Zaur Kharipov. The masked men forced Mr. Ezhiev into one of their cars at gunpoint and drove away to an unknown destination. Mr. Kharipov, the driver, was left behind unharmed. The attackers were speaking Russian without any distinct accent.

Being a regional coordinator of Moscow Helsinki Group monitoring program, Imran Abdulsalamovich Ezhiev (according to the passport Ezheev - a mistake of Passport Service worker) was staying in the Shali district to gather information for an annual report on the situation in the Chechen Republic. Almost every day he called SRCF information centre in Nizhny Novgorod and reported the latest news about the human rights violations in the district.

The Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship reminds that the present accident is not the first one in the chain of provocations against our organization in general, and Mr. Ezhiev in particular.

On September 17, 2000 Imran Ezhiev was detained by Russian soldiers at the blockpost Caucasus-1, when he was driving from Ingushetia to Gudermes to the meeting of the head of the Chechen temporary administration Mr. Kadyrov and representatives of Chechen elders, tent camps commandants and commanders of the federal forces in the Chechen Republic. After the detention Ezhiev was taken to the commandant's office of Achkhoy-Martan district where he was kept in custody without any charges. After the authorities gave some vague explanations about "the mistake", he was released on September 21, 2000.

On October 13, 2000 the Ingush police burst into the office of SRCF information centre in Ingushetia, situated in the town of Karabulak. Without producing a search order, they seized all office equipment and illegally detained Ezhiev. No charges were officially presented. The public activist was released the next day, but the computers were delivered back only on October 23. Another tragedy occurred on the day of Imran's release. At night SRCF correspondent Ruslan Akhmatov, who was walking from the office to the refugee camp in the village Yandare was stabbed in the back. As at that moment the killed was wearing Imran's coat, there are serious grounds to suppose that the fatal blow had been meant to Imran Ezhiev.

On January 5, 2001 on the eve of Imran's departure to Moscow to the All-Russian extraordinary meeting for human rights, a group of armed people burst into the SRCF information centre and, having failed to find Ezhiev, started searching for him. After that Imran had to hide for several days (he had time to warn neither his relatives nor colleagues about the place of his location).

On October 13, 2001 Imran Ezhev was again illegally detained, but this time by policemen from Sunzhen ROVD (police station). No charges were produced against him, still he was kept in the village Sleptsovskaya and then in Groznyy (where he had been taken behind his advocate's back, and where he started starving this way protesting against conducted lawlessness) till November 11. The man, who had gone through a serious heart attack and who suffered from other chronic diseases, was deprived of medical help. That made his colleagues to suppose that officials wanted to get rid of the remedial activist. Ezhev was released by Chechen procurator Vsevolod Chernov after a number of applications handed in by international human rights organizations that asked to protect antiwar movement activist, and after the fact of his illegal detention was included into the report of International League for Human Rights, which was read by George Bush on the eve of his official meeting with Vladimir Putin.

- ♣ On December 13 about 12.00 a.m. at the entrance to the town Argun Russian soldiers killed SRCF member Luiza Betergirieva. At first she worked as a volunteer and than became SRCF correspondent in the Shali district. SRCF volunteer Umar Musaev was wounded. That day Musaev and Betergirieva went to several Shali district settlements to gather information. Russian soldiers checked the produced documents and declared that they could not let them into the town as it was blockaded. After that Musaev and Betergirieva changed direction and moved towards Shali. As soon as they left the blockpost, soldiers started firing at them.
- ♣ On December 18, 2001 about 04.00 a.m. in Ezhev's house in the village Serzhen-Yurt of Shali district unknown people in masks and camouflage killed Imran's elder brother Akhmed Ezhev - an invalid, MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) veteran, who had been wounded while detaining a criminal. On the day of Betergiriva's funeral Akhmed spoke before village residents and enflamed them to fight for their rights notwithstanding any hardships. Being a SRCF volunteer, Akhmed also gathered information on Human rights inobservance in Chechnya.
- ♣ On November 29, 2002 in the town Karabulak of Sunzhen district unknown people, supposedly members of Russian law-enforcement structures, kidnapped and transported to Chechnya commandant of the refugee camp, situated on the territory of the garage owned by enterprise "Ingush-Auto", Adam Arsamikov. Adam cooperated with Imran Ezhev and the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship. Nothing was heard about him since that time.