



United States Mission to the OSCE

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

**Statement by Dr. Ruth Wedgwood
U.S. Delegation to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
October 10, 2003**

Mr. Moderator,

Our subject is Chechnya. The conflict there and the human rights abuses associated with it pose one of the greatest challenges in the human dimension today in the entire OSCE region. Reports and allegations of these abuses – which include disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings – committed by Russian federal forces, by forces of the Kadyrov administration, by Chechen separatist forces, and by terrorists – are matters of grave concern to the U.S. and to all of us.

Reports of night raids allegedly carried out by Russian forces or paramilitary groups associated with the local pro-Moscow administration persist, even as large-scale sweeps of entire villages appear to be declining in frequency. These reports indicate that Chechens picked up in these raids disappear, most often permanently; in some cases, corpses are found. Detainees who return to their families commonly report the use of torture in interrogations and other mistreatment. While reliable numbers are impossible to obtain, credible reports estimate that these disappearances continue on virtually a daily basis.

While we recognize the need for Russia to address these concerns, the U.S. Government has no illusions about certain elements among the Chechen separatists. They have reportedly murdered hostages, kidnapped civilians for ransom and used civilians as shields during combat operations, and embarked on a campaign of inexcusable assassination and – what is always forbidden -- suicide bombings against civilian targets. The United States condemns these acts with equal vigor. The U.S. Government and the United Nations have formally designated three Chechen groups as terrorist organizations for good reason.

The United States calls upon all parties involved in the Chechen conflict to curb abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by their forces.

Mr. Moderator, as the Russian Government grapples with the challenges of developing a political solution to the conflict in Chechnya, we cannot ignore the violations of human rights that continue to take place. The U.S. continues to be the leading foreign provider of humanitarian support for Chechnya and displaced Chechens. At the same time, we urge all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law and ensure accountability for those responsible for violations. These are not technical violations – they implicate the principles of humanity that underlie all of international law.