

RUSSIA/CHECHNYA

FEBRUARY 5: A DAY OF SLAUGHTER IN NOVYE ALDI

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SUMMARY

ON FEBRUARY 5, 2000, RUSSIAN FORCES SUMMARILY EXECUTED AT LEAST SIXTY CIVILIANS IN ALDI AND CHERNORECHIE, SUBURBS OF GROZNY, THE CAPITAL OF CHECHNYA. THE MASSACRE, WHICH AMOUNTS TO A WAR CRIME, TOOK PLACE IN THE MIDST OF A SWEEP OPERATION SEVERAL DAYS AFTER RUSSIAN FORCES SEIZED GROZNY.

THE PERPETRATORS OF THIS MASSACRE WERE RUSSIAN RIOT POLICE AND CONTRACT SOLDIERS, OR MEN HIRED BY THE MILITARY FOR SHORT-TERM SERVICE CONTRACTS. ACCORDING TO THE RUSSIAN MILITARY PROCURACY FOR THE NORTH CAUCASUS, RIOT POLICE UNITS FROM THE CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG AND RIOTAN PROVINCE UNDERTOOK A SWEEP OPERATION IN ALDI THAT DAY. THE UNITS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS IN CHERNORECHIE ARE NOT YET KNOWN. WHILE GOING ON HOUSE-TO-HOUSE DOCUMENT CHECKS TO FERRET OUT CHECHEN REBEL FIGHTERS THEY SHOT THEIR VICTIMS IN COLD BLOOD, WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, AT CLOSE RANGE.

THE VICTIMS RANGED IN AGE FROM A ONE-YEAR-OLD BABY BOY TO AN EIGHTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD WOMAN. AMONG THEM WERE: FIVE MEMBERS OF THE ESTAMIROV FAMILY, INCLUDING TOITA ESTAMIROVA, WHO WAS EIGHT MONTHS PREGNANT; SIXTY-EIGHT-YEAR-OLD AKHMED ABULKHANOV, EXECUTED ALONG WITH HIS NEIGHBORS AND RELATIVES—a sixty-year-old woman, ZINA ABDULMEZHIDOVA AND HER BROTHER, FORTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD KHUSSEIN ABDULMEZHIDOV—WHOM HE HAD ASKED FOR MONEY TO PAY THE BRIBE DEMANDED BY HIS KILLERS; A FATHER, ALVI GANAEV, AGED OVER SIXTY AND HIS TWO SONS, ASLANBEK, ABOUT THIRTY-THREE, AND SULUMBЕК, AGED TWENTY-NINE, SHOT DEAD AS THEY RETURNED HOME FROM REPAIRING A ROOF; FOUR MEMBERS OF THE MUSAEV FAMILY, INCLUDING SEVENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD UMAR; AN EIGHTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD WOMAN, RAKAT AKHMADOVA, SHOT DEAD IN THE STREET AS SHE WENT TO VISIT A RELATIVE; AND SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD RIZVAN UMKHAEV, SHOT DEAD AS HE RAN OUT FROM HIS HOME IN RESPONSE TO AKHMADOVA'S SCREAMS.

SOME KILLINGS WERE ACCOMPANIED BY DEMANDS FOR MONEY OR JEWELRY, WHICH SERVED AS A PRETEXT FOR EXECUTION IF THE AMOUNT PROFFERED WAS INSUFFICIENT; SEVERAL OF THE VICTIMS LACKED IDENTITY PAPERS. A FEW WITNESSES STATED THAT SOLDIERS FORCIBLY REMOVED THE VICTIMS' GOLD TEETH OR STOLE JEWELRY FROM CORPSES. THE KILLINGS WERE OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY ACTS OF ARSON.

DESPITE THE GREAT CULTURAL STIGMA ATTACHED TO RAPE IN CHECHNYA'S PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, REPORTS OF THE RAPE OF WOMEN BY RUSSIAN SOLDIERS IN ALDI ON FEBRUARY 5 HAVE SURFACED. SEVERAL WOMEN GAVE CREDIBLE, SECOND-HAND ACCOUNTS OF SIX CASES OF RAPE. THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS COULD BE MANY MORE THAN ARE CURRENTLY KNOWN. IN ONE INCIDENT, SOLDIERS REPORTEDLY GANG-RAPED FOUR WOMEN AND STRANGLERED THREE OF THEM, LEAVING THE FOURTH FOR DEAD.

Russian contract soldiers forced many homes of Chechen civilians in Aldi. Witness after witness told Human Rights Watch in separate interviews, conducted in private, that they either had seen Russian soldiers deliberately set fire to their homes or property or had returned home to find their homes on fire or burned to the ground. The incidents of arson were wanton acts of gratuitous destruction. Some of the arson seemed to be primitive attempts to destroy evidence of summary executions and other civilian killings. In one incident, the arson itself appeared to have been a murder attempt.

While soldiers engaged in some pillage on February 5, pillage on a massive scale took place during the following week. Witnesses stated that soldiers returned in large numbers on February 10, and in broad daylight brazenly stripped their homes of goods of value.

The Russian authorities' investigation into the Aldi massacre was accompanied by indignant public denial. Typical of the Russian military's reaction to Human Rights Watch's preliminary report on the killings was a February 24 statement, by a Ministry of Defense spokesman, declaring that "these assertions are nothing but a concoction not supported by fact or any proof . . . [and] should be seen as a provocation whose goal is to discredit the federal forces' operation against the terrorists in Chechnya." In fact, investigators from the Federal Security Service (the successor agency to the KGB), the military, and the civilian procuracies had, by the time of that statement, already commenced their investigations. As of this writing, there are reportedly three civilian procurators investigating the killings. To the best of our knowledge, no one has been charged and no serviceman or military commander has been suspended pending the outcome of the investigation.

The international community has limited itself, in the form of a United Nations Human Rights Commission resolution, to calling for an independent national commission of inquiry into human rights abuses in Chechnya. But because the Russian government to date has shown a clear lack of political will to vigorously investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of the Aldi massacre, a national commission of inquiry is likely to be inadequate. Further, several witnesses expressed their fear and mistrust of the Russian investigators who came to Aldi, they stated that they had withheld information for fear of reprisals. Only an international commission of inquiry could enjoy the trust of the eyewitnesses and that of the relatives of the massacre survivors. Until such an international commission is formed, with the ability to recommend prosecutions, there remains little likelihood of the guilty ever being punished.

In the course of researching this report, Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed more than thirty-five residents of Aldi; some of them were witnesses of the killings, others were close relatives of the victims. While it is customary practice for Human Rights Watch researchers to travel directly to the site of human rights abuses to see for themselves the scene of the alleged crimes, in Chechnya, this has not been possible. Research was undertaken from the neighboring Republic of Ingushetia. Russian authorities have repeatedly denied requests from Human Rights Watch for access to Chechnya despite issuing public statements to the contrary. Such limitation on the work of Human Rights Watch and other international and national human rights groups does little to encourage the belief that the Russian government is serious in its publicly stated desire to ensure respect for human rights in Chechnya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of the Russian Federation:

Direct Government Forces to Cease Violations of International Humanitarian Law

- Direct all Russian Federation forces—including Ministry of Defense troops, OMON and other Ministry of Internal Affairs units—to cease violations of international humanitarian law, including summary executions, rape, pillage, and the deliberate destruction of civilian property; instruct these forces that perpetrators of such violations will bear criminal responsibility. Special efforts should be made to convey this direction to contract soldiers; and
- Direct all Russian Federation forces to stop the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force against the civilian population; take all necessary steps to protect civilian populations from the effects of military and police operations.

Conduct a Full and Objective Investigation into the Massacre

- Reinvalidate the investigation of the abuses committed in Aldi and prosecute those found responsible;
- Identify and immediately suspend the commanding officer or officers responsible for military activity in Aldi on February 5, pending the outcome of a full criminal investigation into civilian killings by Russian forces that day;
- Identify and immediately suspend from duty, pending the outcome of the investigation, those contract soldiers and OMON officers found to have served in Aldi on February 5, and instigate criminal proceedings against those found to have either engaged, assisted or otherwise participated in or knowingly and willfully failed to stop summary executions, rape, arson, looting and other acts of wanton violence and destruction against civilians and civilian property; identify which military units were in Aldi subsequent to the massacre, in particular on February 10 who engaged in the looting of civilian homes in the area and instigate criminal proceedings against them;
- Establish a witness protection program to protect witnesses from reprisals and to encourage witnesses to the February 5 massacre to come forward. Potential witnesses should be made aware of such a program; and
- Conduct a diligent and independent investigation into rape and other forms of sexual violence against women in Aldi, taking steps to ensure that those alleged to have committed rape or other forms of sexual violence are prosecuted; ensure that the Aldi investigation team is gender-integrated and that whenever possible, interviews with rape victims will be conducted by female investigators with training in rape investigations; include examinations for evidence of rape and sexual violence in autopsies of female bodies.

Provide Access for the OSCE, Human Rights and Humanitarian Organizations, and Media

- Cease delaying the deployment of the Assistance Group of the OSCE to Ingushetia and Chechnya;
- Agree to the immediate deployment in Ingushetia and Chechnya of an independent, international commission of inquiry with a mandate to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and the ability to recommend prosecutions in appropriate cases;
- Immediately grant unrestricted access to Aldi and other massacre sites in Chechnya, such as Alkhan-Yurt and the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny, to international human rights and humanitarian organizations;
- Facilitate prompt visits by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women; the U.N. Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture; the Special Representative of the Secretary General for children and armed conflict; and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for internally displaced persons; and
- Allow full and unimpeded access for local and foreign journalists and national and international organizations covering the conflict in Chechnya.

To the United Nations, OSCE, Council of Europe, European Union, United States, and other international actors:

Representatives of various international organizations and governments, including the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States have repeatedly exhorted the Russian government to investigate abuses committed in Chechnya and to hold those responsible accountable. Although the Russian government had not undertaken a credible investigation, on April 25, 2000, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights failed to call for the creation of an international inquiry into the abuses, instead calling once again on the Russian government to conduct an investigation. More than one month later, the Russian government continues to make no meaningful

progress on accountability for abuses in Chechnya. Accordingly, Human Rights Watch once again calls on representatives of the international community to:

- Establish an international commission of inquiry that would observe, investigate, and report upon the human rights and humanitarian conditions relating to the military operation in Chechnya, and that have the ability to recommend prosecutions in appropriate cases. The commission would also provide assistance to Russian authorities in the carrying out of investigations.

To the United Nations:

On April 25, 2000 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution calling for the formation of an independent national commission of inquiry to investigate “alleged violations . . . of international humanitarian law. In the resolution, the UNCHR requested the relevant rapporteurs and working groups of the commission to undertake missions to the region, and urged the Russian government to facilitate such missions.

Continue to Pursue Engagement Through the High Commissioner for Human Rights

- The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, should continue her commitment to working on Chechnya. A deadline should be set for her return visit to the region, to which the Russian government has committed itself. The visit, which should be carried out as soon as possible, should include a visit to Aldi. And the High Commissioner should continue to otherwise engage the Russian government on its implementation of the April 25 resolution.

Pursue Procedures of U.N. Special Human Rights Mechanisms

- The U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for children and armed conflict, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for internally displaced persons should vigorously pursue the visits to the North Caucasus mandated by the April 25 resolution. This initiative should be joined by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

To the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe:

Deploy an Expanded OSCE Assistance Group in the Region

On April 11, 1995, the OSCE established the Assistance Group to Chechnya. Its mandate, explicitly reaffirmed by all OSCE member states, including Russia, at the November 1999 Istanbul Summit, provides that it will, among other things, “promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and “facilitate the delivery to the region by international and nongovernmental organizations of humanitarian aid for victims of the crisis, wherever they may be located.” The Assistance Group enjoys “all possible freedom of movement on the territory of the Chechen Republic and also on the territory of neighboring subjects of the Russian Federation, if so required for the performance of its tasks.” Since the outbreak of hostilities in Chechnya in September 1999, the Assistance Group has not redeployed a permanent presence in the North Caucasus and its six-member team is currently based in Moscow.

- As is foreseen under the existing Assistance Group mandate, the OSCE should immediately deploy an expanded Assistance Group delegation to Chechnya and Ingushetia: to gather evidence of violations of human rights and humanitarian law being committed in Chechnya; to report publicly on any such abuses and make recommendations to the Russian government to curb abuses and hold those responsible accountable; and to monitor the treatment of displaced persons and advise the Russian authorities and international agencies with respect to needed humanitarian assistance;
- In accordance with the 1994 Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, Articles 30 and 31, the OSCE must insist on Russia’s obligations to investigate abuses committed by Russian Federation troops in

Chechnya, including in Aldi, and prosecute those found responsible. The OSCE should insist that Russia keeps the Chair-in-Office and the OSCE Permanent Council informed on progress in this regard; and

- The OSCE Assistance Group should cooperate with any investigation undertaken by the Russian government, but any monitoring or other activities by the Assistance Group should remain independent and distinct from the activities of Russian government institutions.

To the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Bilateral Donors:

Impose Conditionality on International Loans

- Immediately suspend payment of all pending loan installments payable to the Russian Federation for unrestricted general budgetary spending, including pending World Bank payments under its structural adjustment loans. Signal that such payments will not resume until the Russian Federation takes meaningful steps to limit the civilian toll imposed by its military operation in Chechnya. Such steps should include serious, transparent, and impartial investigations of abuses committed and accountability for those responsible, and acceptance of a sustained international monitoring presence in Chechnya and Ingushetia and full cooperation with its activities;
- Refuse to negotiate any new loans or to renegotiate any existing loans until the above steps are taken; and
- Establish the July 2000 G8 Summit in Japan as a target date by which point meaningful steps toward a credible investigation are expected.

To the Council of Europe:

Contribute to an International Presence

- Provide whatever technical assistance would be appropriate to international monitoring or investigative missions deployed to Ingushetia and Chechnya; and
- Insist on the independence of its staff seconded to the office of the Presidential Representative on Human Rights in Chechnya, including their freedom of movement and their right of unfettered communication with the Council of Europe secretariat and with the public.

Commence Legal Actions before the European Court of Human Rights

- Member states of the Council of Europe should file interstate complaints against the Russian Federation at the European Court of Human Rights for the massacre at Aldi and for other incidents of gross violations of international humanitarian law.

Instigate a Committee of Ministers Investigation

- As envisioned by its 1994 Declaration, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers should set in motion a special investigation into Russia's compliance with its Council of Europe commitments.

To the European Union and the United States:

Insist on Accountability for Violations and Access for International Monitors

Discussing alleged abuses in Chechnya before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Portuguese Foreign Minister, Jaime Gama, speaking on behalf of the European Union, stated that a "serious and independent investigation must be carried out without delay in order that those responsible can be brought to account." Addressing the same forum, U.S. Secretary of State Albright called for "prompt and transparent investigation of all credible charges." To date, the Russian government has failed to undertake a serious investigation of abuses in Chechnya. It is therefore necessary for the E.U. and the U.S. to press forward for a two-track process of accountability involving both national and international inquiries. Specifically, the E.U. and the U.S. should:

- In bilateral and multinational public and private communications with the Russian government, emphasize that abuses, such as summary executions, rape, pillage, and the deliberate destruction of civilian property, that have been committed by Russian government forces in Chechnya amount to war crimes and serious violations of international law;
- Continue to press the Russian Federation to undertake a thorough, transparent investigation of abuses committed in Chechnya and to hold accountable those responsible, warning that accountability is a non-negotiable minimum condition for enhanced political, economic, and security relationships with the Russian Federation; and
- Set the July 2000 G8 Summit in Japan as a target date by which the international community expects meaningful progress by the Russian national commission of inquiry; after this date the U.S. government and the E.U. must be prepared to engage the Russian government to accept an international commission of inquiry.

Condition International Financial Assistance on an International Monitoring Presence and Accountability

- Oppose payment of any pending loan installments payable to the Russian Federation for unrestricted general budgetary spending, including pending World Bank payments under its structural adjustment loans. Assert the position that such payments should not resume until the Russian Federation takes meaningful steps to limit the civilian toll imposed by its military operation in Chechnya and hold those responsible for abuses accountable. Such steps should include serious, transparent, and impartial investigations of abuses committed and accountability for those responsible, acceptance of an international monitoring presence in Ingushetia and Chechnya and full cooperation with its activities, and meaningful steps to curb looting and the destruction of civilian property in Chechnya; and
- Oppose any new loans or renegotiation of any existing loans until these same steps are taken.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed more than thirty-five people about the massacre in Aldi and neighboring Chernorechie. The interviewees either witnessed the murders, discovered the dead bodies, or were the close relatives of victims. Most interviewees also bore witness to arson and pillage in Aldi. All interviews took place in Ingushetia, the republic of Russia that borders Chechnya to the west. In most cases interviews were conducted privately and separately.

Whenever possible, Human Rights Watch researchers travel directly to the site of human rights abuses to see for themselves the scene of the alleged crimes; in Chechnya this has not been possible. Russian authorities have repeatedly denied requests from Human Rights Watch for access to Chechnya despite issuing public statements to the contrary.¹

For example, on February 18, according to the Russian news agency, Interfax, First Deputy Chief of Staff General Valerii Manilov said in a press conference that "the Ministry of Defense was prepared to help Human Rights Watch gain access to Chechnya and to assist in monitoring the situation in Chechnya as much as possible." General Manilov accused Human Rights Watch of publishing reports that were "mainly based on rumors," and stated "that is why we have agreed to assist Human Rights Watch in obtaining first-hand information."² On March 10, General

¹ Human Rights Watch wrote to the Ministry of Defense on November 17, 1999, and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 12, 2000 requesting access to Chechnya. The Ministry of Defense declined Human Rights Watch's request; we received no reply from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

² Interfax news agency, as cited by BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, February 18, 2000.

Manilov told Human Rights Watch staff that it “makes sense to look at widening the sphere of the activity of Human Rights Watch,”³ but refrained from making a clear commitment about access.

Vladimir Kalamonov, President Vladimir Putin’s special representative on Chechnya, told Human Rights Watch that he was “taking titanic steps to get Human Rights Watch access to Chechnya, as well as for other international and domestic human rights organizations.”⁴ Regrettably, despite these statements of intent, Human Rights Watch does not have access to Chechnya as of this writing.

³Human Rights Watch meeting with General Manilov, Moscow, March 10, 2000.

⁴Human Rights Watch meeting with Vladimir Kalamonov, Moscow, Russia, April 19, 2000.

Because of this lack of access, Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed those witnesses who either were internally displaced in Ingushetia, or who were prepared to make the hazardous journey from Grozny in order to tell their story. This journey meant running a gauntlet of Russian checkpoints within Chechnya and at the border with Ingushetia, as well as travel through an active combat zone.⁵ Several witnesses communicated through an intermediary their desire to talk to Human Rights Watch but declined to travel, citing the risks to their safety.

BACKGROUND

Aldi, known formally as Novye [New] Aldi, is a residential suburb of the city of Grozny, located on the southwest edge of the city. According to an Aldi resident who prior to the war worked in the administration of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, the pre-war population of Aldi was 27,000, most of whom fled the fighting. This witness said there were approximately 2,000 people left on February 5.⁶ Aldi borders a large reservoir, intersected by a dam, over which runs a road to Chernorechie, a district that neighbors Aldi to the west. There are none of the high-rise apartment blocks in Aldi that are characteristic of most of the suburban areas of the city. Rather, the homes are largely single or two-story separate houses, located in family compounds sometimes containing two houses and often a stable. Most compounds have their own high-gated entrance into a communal front yard.

The current military campaign in Chechnya began in September 1999. It was sparked by an armed incursion by Chechen fighters into the neighboring republic of Dagestan in August and a series of apartment building bombings in September that claimed the lives of almost 300 civilians. Russian authorities blamed Chechens for the bombings.

After advancing quickly through northern Chechnya, taking several towns without a fight—including Chechnya's second largest city, Gudermes—Russian forces began focusing their offensive on the Chechen capital, Grozny, the scene of very heavy fighting. In November, Russian troops fought hard to encircle the city and cut off supply lines from the south. Russian forces exhibited an even greater reliance on rocket, artillery, and aerial bombardment than that witnessed in the 1994-1996 war.⁷ These tactics, undoubtedly employed in an attempt to reduce casualties among its own forces, caused thousands of deaths and injuries among the civilian population throughout Chechnya, and led to the destruction of Grozny.⁸

⁵ On January 11, 2000, Russian authorities imposed a blanket travel ban on Chechen males aged between ten and sixty from traveling outside of the republic (see Human Rights Watch press release, "Russia Closes Chechnya Border to Male Civilians; Blanket Ban Traps Men in War Zone," January 12, 2000). Although this ban was rescinded within days of its inception, likely due to international pressure, restrictions on the movement of Chechen civilians, in particular males, have continued to be enforced. Further, Chechen civilians have faced severe beatings, extortion, sexual harassment of women, verbal taunting, and arbitrary detention at checkpoints. (See, for example, Human Rights Watch press releases: "Bribery and Abuse along New Escape Route out of Chechnya: Russian Soldiers at Checkpoints Extorting and Beating Chechens," December 14, 1999; "More Evidence of Rape by Russian Forces in Chechnya," March 30, 2000.) Press releases are available at www.hrw.org.

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000. The interviewee did not want to be identified.

⁷ Dr. Mark Galeotti, "The Russian Army in Chechnya," by *Jane's Intelligence Review*, December 1, 1999:

The Russian invasion could be described as a textbook success. Lessons were learnt from the last Chechen debacle. Spearhead units of a much larger invasion force were largely made up of elite troops. They avoided getting bogged down in urban and mountain warfare, where the guerillas had the advantage, but stuck to the lowlands and wider valleys. Settlements were either bypassed or levelled by heavy air and artillery bombardments in a programme of pacification by depopulation.

⁸ See, for example, the explanatory memorandum to the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe report, "Conflict in Chechnya—Implementation by Russia of Recommendation 1444 (2000)," by rapporteur Lord Judd, April 4, 2000:

18. The Ad Hoc Committee was deeply moved by its visit to Grozny. The centre of the city has been totally and systematically destroyed. We did not see a single building intact . . . In the centre of the city it has been estimated that there are only some 1,000 to 1,500 people left, and they are living in conditions of total privation.

19. Although the city had already suffered damage in the earlier conflict in Chechnya, the current level of destruction suggests that Grozny has been the target of indiscriminate, disproportionate bombardment by the Russian forces. The state of the city and the accounts given by people from Grozny in refugee camps in Ingushetia clearly indicate that many civilians perished in the bombardment. Only a thorough enquiry will be able to determine the exact number of victims.

The battle for Grozny itself commenced in earnest in December and was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the war to date. Chechen fighters put up fierce resistance from well-prepared and heavily fortified positions, using the urban terrain to their advantage, much as they had during the 1994-1996 war. Both parties to the conflict have exaggerated the other side's losses while underestimating their own, and reliable data are unavailable. However, it is clear that in the battle for Grozny, both sides took some of their heaviest casualties of the war.

At the end of January, Chechen fighters began to leave Grozny en masse, their exodus precipitated by the fall of Minutka Square, a central district of Grozny, on January 31 after two weeks of heavy fighting.⁹ By February 1, the overwhelming majority of the fighters had left the city en route to the southern Caucasus mountain range. Estimates vary, but most observers put the number of fighters leaving the city at approximately 3,000.

Russian forces largely encircled Grozny and subjected it to fierce and sustained aerial and artillery bombardment. They laid a large number of small anti-personnel landmines along the exit route the fighters took, causing many casualties. Typical of the response to the fighters' flight to the mountains was the heavy bombardment of populated areas in which columns of fighters appeared: Shaami-Yurt, Katyr-Yurt, and Gekhi-Chu.¹⁰ Residents often stated that by the time Russian forces commenced bombing, most of the fighters had already left.

Insofar as Human Rights Watch has been able to ascertain, Aldi itself was not a target for Russian bombardment prior to February 3. Equally, it appears that the settlement was not used by the fighters in any discernable way during the war; there are no reports of clashes between Russian forces and Chechen fighters in the village. In contrast, the arrival of several thousand Chechen rebel fighters in Alkhan-Kala, a village about seven kilometers southwest of Aldi, is well documented.¹¹ Given Aldi's geographical proximity, Chechen fighters may have passed through or close by to Aldi on their retreat from the city, but there is no evidence to document this.

Contact between local villagers and the Russian military centered upon their pleas that the military not bomb the area. For example, on the morning of February 3, approximately one hundred Aldi residents went to the military commander of District Twenty (Dvadtsaty Uchastok in Russian) to state that there were no fighters in Aldi and that it should not be subjected to shelling. Neighboring areas, such as District Twenty and Chernorechie were, prior to February 5, the scenes of very heavy fighting and aerial and artillery bombardment. Aldi residents stated that while Aldi was occasionally struck, they believe by stray shells and rockets, until early February, it had not been specifically targeted.¹²

FEBRUARY 3: THE SHELLING OF ALDI

⁹ See, for example, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, "Russians Continue Grozny Advance," February 2, 2000.

¹⁰ See Human Rights Watch press release, "Russian Soldiers Executed Seven Men in Chechen Village, Snipers in Gekhi-Chu Shot Civilians," March 31, 2000; Yevgenia Borisova, "Guerrillas, Federals Blaze Trail of Misery," *The Moscow Times*, February 10, 2000.

¹¹ See, for example, Janine di Giovanni, "Battered rebel army flees fallen Grozny," *The Times of London*, February 2, 2000.

¹² One witness, Akhmed A. said that approximately sixty-six persons from Aldi and surrounding areas who were killed by shelling are buried in the grounds of the Aldi polyclinic. He said a total of about some fifty persons were killed by shellfire in November, December and January 2000.

The shelling of Aldi began on February 3 and ended the following afternoon. At least five civilians died in the shelling. Three witnesses interviewed separately by Human Rights Watch stated that Russian planes dropped cluster bombs on Aldi. Akhmed A. (name withheld) told Human Rights Watch that on the morning of February 3, he, along with about one hundred local residents, went to District Twenty to talk to the Russian commanders and to tell them that there were no fighters in Aldi. Akhmed. A. told Human Rights Watch what happened later that day:

Before February 3, virtually no houses were damaged. About midday, the Russians started bombing and shelling—planes dropped bombs on parachutes, helicopters over Minutka¹³ were firing. They dropped big bombs and bombs that exploded in the air that then released about ten bombs on parachutes—cluster bombs [*kassetnie* in Russian]. The bombing destroyed parts of Third Tsimliansky Lane and Irtyshskaia Street.”¹⁴

Sultan Aidaev stated that he was with his father in Aldi on February 3 when Russian planes started to drop cluster bombs. Aidaev told Human Rights Watch:

On February 3, I was getting ready to make some bread for my father. When I was washing my hands, I heard planes. Then I heard a bang from the plane. At that moment, my father was entering the house. My father said that parachutes were thrown from the planes. I told him to take cover. I had seen parachute bombs from a safe distance when they were dropped on Okruznaia.¹⁵ I saw the bombs explode in the air—like fireworks—they exploded before they hit the ground, they looked like they were controllable. They produced a lot of shrapnel and blew off the roofs of houses. I think that the bombs with parachutes dropped on Aldi were the same.¹⁶

FEBRUARY 4: RUSSIAN CONSCRIPT SOLDIERS ARRIVE

*Everyone, especially the elderly, was happy that everything was over. That night was the first night that my father slept in the house.*¹⁷

At about midday on February 4, the shelling of Aldi ceased and the first Russian soldiers, who were conscripts, arrived. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch universally described these soldiers as conscripts—identifiable as such by their young age (about eighteen or nineteen years old)—wearing very dirty uniforms, and with dirty faces. Conscripts told residents not to stay in their cellars any longer and to have their identity documents ready for inspection the following day. They did not conduct house-to-house searches. Raisa Soltakhanova, who lives on Matasha-Mazaeva Street, told Human Rights Watch:

I asked them [conscripts] whether we should show our passports. They said, “no, don’t stay in your cellars, contract soldiers will come and throw grenades in.” There were twenty, twenty-five soldiers on my street.¹⁸

¹³ Minutka Square, the center of Grozny and the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

¹⁵ Okruznaia, a street on the edge of Aldi.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

Sultan Aidaev, who was staying on Tsimlianskaia Street, gave the same version of events. He told Human Rights Watch that on February 4, he saw forty or fifty soldiers walking down the street:

They didn't go into houses. After soldiers left, people went out into the street and began to exchange information. I heard someone say that people shouldn't stay in cellars, that we should go back to our homes, there won't be any more shelling. Everyone, especially the elderly, was happy that everything was over. That night was the first night that my father slept in the house.¹⁹

A third witness also identified the soldiers as conscripts—under twenty years of age and badly dressed.²⁰

FEBRUARY 5: OMON AND THE CONTRACT SOLDIERS ARRIVE

That day, after midday prayers, I heard screams in the street. I saw two soldiers running down the road shouting warnings that contract soldiers were coming. They shouted "If you have fighters, hide them. If you have young women, hide them or they will be raped." I then saw contract soldiers coming with scarves on their heads. Aldi resident, Malika M.²¹

On February 5, multiple units consisting predominantly of Russian *kontraktniki* (contract soldiers)²² entered Aldi, likely numbering in excess of one hundred men, ostensibly to check villagers' identity documents, to flush out fighters who might attempt to resist them, and to detain suspected fighters who had been left behind. They were serving either alongside or within units of OMON, the riot police.²³ There are consistent reports of the presence of much smaller numbers of conscript soldiers among the units. These conscripts, identifiable by their youth, also distinguished themselves in a number of incidents during which they either acted to warn residents of the imminent presence of and danger posed by the contract soldiers, or by their active intervention to save the lives of civilians. Contract soldiers are readily identifiable as such by their age, typically over thirty, and are often bearded and wear head scarves.

A witness who agreed to speak only under a strict guarantee of anonymity for fear of reprisal described the soldiers in more detail:

The soldiers had tattoos of an anchor on their hands, like criminals. The soldiers looked like Russians. They were not Ossetian or Dagestani....The commander had blue eyes, fair hair, was of average height, and was slim. He had reddish stubble. I didn't notice any rank....They called themselves police. Two soldiers had Asian eyes, they were from northern Russia. The soldiers who came on the fifth used a code name on the radio: "Kaban" [Russian for boar.] I heard them use the names Dima and Sergei.²⁴

The witness identified one of the soldiers as the commander by his clothing—he wore a uniform jacket, whereas the others wore camouflage—and by the orders he gave to other soldiers:

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Asiat Chaadaeva, Kantyshevo, March 23, 2000.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Malika M. (not her real name), Ingushetia, March 2, 2000.

²² Contract soldiers work on short-term military service contracts. Chechen civilians usually describe Russian soldiers as being either *srochniki* — conscripts — or *kontraktniki* — contract soldiers. They identify conscript soldiers as such by their young age. Chechen civilians typically use the blanket term "kontraktniki" for all other Russian forces.

²³ OMON stands for Otriad Militsii Osobogo Naznachenia, or special task militia unit.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Ingushetia, March 2000. Contract soldiers were among those responsible for the massacre and pillage at Alkhan-Yurt in December 1999. For further information on these incidents, see "No Happiness Remains: Civilian Killings, Pillage and Rape in Alkhan-Yurt," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, vol.12, no. 5(D), April 2000.

The commander took me by the sleeve of my jacket and said that his soldiers had killed several Chechen men by mistake and ordered me to organize their burial quickly.²⁵

Judging by witness testimony, Ministry of Defense units were also actively engaged in the sweep operation on February 5. The first soldiers entered Aldi at about 9:00 a.m. Witnesses first saw the soldiers at different times of the morning—depending on the routes the soldiers took and how long they spent on each particular street or at each particular house.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, exact location and date withheld, Ingushetia, March 2000.

Luisa Umkhaeva described hearing gunshots at approximately 11:00 a.m. She told Human Rights Watch that “three soldiers came into our yard. They were about forty-five, fifty years old in green military uniform. They wore knitted hats.”²⁶

Aina Mezhidova also said the soldiers came at 11:00 a.m.:

Some were wearing head scarves; some were in masks. They were in green military camouflage; some were in grey camouflage. They were between thirty-five and forty years old.²⁷

Another witness stated that residents had found the passport of one of the contract soldiers, who they said, had dropped it on February 5. Although Human Rights Watch researchers did not see a copy of the passport, they were given the passport details of a thirty-two-year-old Russian man from Krasnodar province. Other witnesses told Human Rights Watch that when the contract soldiers returned, they went from house to house asking Aldi residents if they had found the passport of one of their men.

FEBRUARY 5: THE KILLINGS BEGIN

I went further down the street. On Mazaeva 142, I saw seventy-two-year-old Magomed Gaitaev's body. His glasses were hanging on a fence. He was lying in a pool of blood. A dog was licking the blood. He had wounds on his head and chest.

Aldi resident

The conscripts said they had an order to kill everyone. “Behind us are Orel OMON, we don't know what they'll do with you.”

Aldi resident

As soldiers spread through Aldi, they engaged in an orgy of killing, arson, and rape. Human Rights Watch has eye witness testimony describing the murder of eight people; in each case the witnesses identified the killers as Russian contract soldiers. We also have detailed testimonies describing thirty-two other bodies found on February 5. Each instance has been compiled from testimony from at least two sources, and in most instances the killings are confirmed by multiple witnesses. At least sixty people were summarily executed that day, although that figure should in no way be considered exhaustive.²⁸

Human Rights Watch has been able to confirm the executions of at least sixty civilians by Russian forces on February 5. Fifty-two of the victims were men, eight were women. Forty-four of the victims were forty years of age and over, and the average age of the victims that day was forty-seven. The oldest victim, a woman named Rakat Akhmadova, was eighty-two, the youngest, Khassan Estamirov, was one year old.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptsovsk, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

²⁸ See appendix A for a list of confirmed deaths. See appendix B for a list of unconfirmed deaths.

It is unclear what precisely motivated these units to commit the mass murder of Aldi civilians. Some believe that the soldiers had been involved in heavy fighting, perhaps around Minutka Square, where fighting raged for more than two weeks before it fell to Russian forces on January 31. According to this interpretation, Russian forces sought to avenge the heavy losses endured through the previous two weeks.²⁹ It is absolutely clear, however, that the violence in no way can be construed to have served a military purpose. There are no reports whatsoever of any Chechen fighter activity in Aldi that day or previously, there was no evidence of fire fight during which civilians may have perished, nor are there any accounts of spontaneous armed resistance to the Russian soldiers in Aldi by the civilian population, individually or collectively. On the contrary, while Aldi's residents may not have welcomed the arrival of Russian soldiers per se, they clearly believed that it signified the end of the fighting, something that many had been waiting for several months.

In perpetrating the massacre at Aldi, Russian forces unquestionably committed acts that amount to war crimes. Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions, which applies to internal armed conflicts, strictly forbids summary executions.³⁰ Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions also protects civilian immunity in internal armed conflicts and specifically prohibits violence to life protected persons.³¹

²⁹This theory is supported by similar civilian killings, albeit on a lesser scale, in the village of Alkhan-Yurt in December 1999 and in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny in January 2000. In each case, the killings were preceded by heavy fighting in the area. See, "No Happiness Remains: Civilian Killings, Pillage and Rape in Alkhan-Yurt," and "Civilian Killings in the Staropromyslovsky District of Grozny," a *Human Rights Watch Short Report*, vol.12, no. 2(D), February 2000.

³⁰ Common article 3 obliges states:

In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

1. Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) Taking of hostages;
- (c) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

2. The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for. An impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict.

The Parties to the conflict should further endeavour to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention.

The application of the preceding provisions shall not affect the legal status of the Parties to the conflict.

³¹ Protocol II article 4 states:

1. All persons who do not take a direct part or who have ceased to take part in hostilities, whether or not their

liberty has been restricted, are entitled to respect for their person, honour and convictions and religious practices. They shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. It is prohibited to order that there shall be no survivors.

2. Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, the following acts against the persons referred to in paragraph I are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever:

- (a) violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment;
- (b) collective punishments;
- (c) taking of hostages;
- (d) acts of terrorism;
- (e) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form or indecent assault;
- (f) slavery and the slave trade in all their forms;
- (g) pillage;
- (h) threats to commit any or the foregoing acts.

Killings on Matasha-Mazaeva Street and Environs

Matasha-Mazaeva Street runs the length of Aldi and is the central street of the village. Judging by the eyewitness accounts, it appears the Russian soldiers walked down this street first and then spread out through the village. This perhaps explains why the majority of the victims killed that day were those staying on Matasha-Mazaeva Street.

The killing of Akhmed Abulkhanov, Zina Abdulmezhidova, and Khussein Abdulmezhidov

At about 3:00 p.m., soldiers shot sixty-eight-year-old Akhmed Abulkhanov and his neighbors, sixty-year-old Zina Abdulmezhidova and her forty-seven-year-old brother, Khussein Abdulmezhidov. The three were shot in the Abdulmezhidov's yard on Third Tsimliansky Lane. A group of soldiers had come to Abulkhanov's house at 145 Matasha-Mazaeva Street demanding money. Abulkhanov went to the Abdulmezhidovs' to borrow some; dissatisfied by the small amount, the soldiers, who had accompanied Abulkhanov, shot him and the Abdulmezhidovs.

Throughout the day on February 5, multiple groups of soldiers came to the home of Akhmed Abulkhanov at 145 Matasha-Mazaeva Street in central Aldi. Abulkhanov's daughter-in-law, Luisa Abulkhanova, described to Human Rights Watch that she began to hear shooting around 9:00 a.m. that day, and that a group of soldiers that came to the house shot the family dog. According to Abulkhanova, in response to the family's complaints the soldiers retorted "you should thank us for not shooting you."³² Later that morning, around 11:00 or 12:00, she and Abulkhanov looked out from their yard into the street and saw the dead bodies of their neighbors. "We were scared to go into the street. But we just thought that we should drag the bodies into the yard," she told Human Rights Watch.³³

Around 3:00 p.m., Abulkhanov asked another group of soldiers that came to the house for permission to bury the bodies; they refused, saying that he could recover the bodies that night. Soon after, another group of soldiers, the seventh that day, came to the Abulkhanov house, put all the family members against a wall, and demanded money. Abulkhanova told Human Rights Watch:

They were more scary—they came in shouting and yelling . . . They shouted and swore [at us] to get out. I think that they were contract soldiers—their faces were very dirty and it was difficult to recognize them. They were wearing white snow uniforms . . . My father-in-law handed them his documents but they threw them into the yard. We were put against the wall in the yard; my father-in-law, mother-in-law, their niece and twelve-year-old son, Islam, and myself. They continued swearing and took the twelve-year-old boy aside, saying he was a future fighter.

³² Human Rights Watch interview, March 3, 2000, Nesterovskaia, Ingushetia.

³³ Ibid.

My father-in-law said “Guys, what are you doing?” The soldiers struck him in the heart with a rifle-butt—my father-in-law has a heart condition. They started asking for wine, money, and gold. The women took off their earrings and gave them to the soldiers. We said we didn’t have any wine in the house. They then demanded money—they didn’t believe we didn’t have any. My father-in-law said that he would borrow money from a neighbor. One soldier went with Abulkhanov to the Abdulmezhidov home [on Third Tsimliansky Lane], where he was able to borrow 300 rubles. The soldiers were not happy with 300 rubles and shot him and Zina and Khussein Abdulmezhidov in their yard.³⁴

A Human Rights Watch researcher interviewed two other witnesses who saw the body of Akhmed Abulkhanov. The bodies of Zina Abdulmezhidova and Khussein Abdulmezhidov are depicted alongside Abulkhanov’s in a home video, filmed by an Aldi resident on February 9, of the victims of the February 5 killings.³⁵

Abulkhanova described how, in a separate incident, but at about the same time, a soldier threatened to execute Zina Abdulmezhidova’s daughter-in-law, Malika Labazanova, about forty-five years old, in a nearby yard. She told Human Rights Watch what she learned from Malika:

There were two soldiers in the neighbors’ yard. One of them wanted to see the house—he asked Malika Labazanova . . . After he checked the house, the soldier wanted to shoot her. She kneeled, begging him not to do it. He replied, “These bullets belong to you, lie down and don’t move” and fired into the air. He said that if the commander learns that he didn’t kill her, he [the commander] will kill “both you and me.”³⁶

The killing of Kaipa, Avalu Sugaipov, Abdulla and Salamu Magomadov, and two unidentified men

Kaipa, whose surname and permanent address is unknown, had been staying, together with her nine-year-old daughter, at Avalu Sugaipov’s house at 152 Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Beginning in February, Sugaipov also hosted two men who had no identification papers and who were not from Aldi. At some point at midmorning, soldiers shot all of them—except Leila, the nine-year-old girl—and set the house on fire.

Raisa Soltakhanova, a thirty-nine-year-old hospital cook and Aldi resident, lived at 183 Matasha-Mazaeva Street, directly across from the Sugaipovs’ home. During the shelling of Aldi, she had taken shelter with Sugaipov, Kaipa, Leila, and the Magomadovs, among others, in a neighbor’s cellar. Soltakhanova told Human Rights Watch that they all emerged from the cellar at around 6:00 a.m. on February 5 and went to their respective homes. By 9:00 a.m., she reported, soldiers had made their way through Matasha-Mazaeva Street from Okruznaia Street, and had arrived at her house. She told Human Rights Watch:

My mother and I were putting up plastic sheeting when the soldiers came at 9:00 a.m. The soldiers were wearing black scarves, some had knitted hats. They were wearing camouflage uniforms. They came from the beginning of the street breaking the gates of unoccupied houses by shooting out the locks. They tried first with their feet; if it didn’t yield, they then shot it out.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch is in possession of a copy of the videotape. The victims’ names and street addresses as given in the videotape correspond with eyewitness testimony taken by Human Rights Watch from more than thirty witnesses and close relatives of the victims.

³⁶ Ibid.

A soldier ran into my yard. He shouted, "They are angry, they are killing everyone, go into the house." He was short with small eyes, about twenty-five years old. He had the same uniform as the others. It seemed like he was a conscript soldier. He made my mother and me go into our house and closed the door.³⁷

Another soldier then arrived and told Soltakhanova and her family to go outside. Raisa described to Human Rights Watch what they saw:

My mother, two sons and I went out into the yard and we saw Magomadov's house...on fire. My two sons were crying when they saw the fire. There was one soldier in the yard, another brought nine-year-old Leila from Avalu's house, she had a can of beef in her hand.

I asked Leila where her mother was. She said that she had been killed. Then I asked where Avalu was; she said that he had also been killed.³⁸

Soltakhanova went to Sugaipov's home at about midday to see for herself what had happened. She found Kaipa lying face down in a pool of blood, and saw the right-hand building in his family compound in flames. She described to Human Rights Watch what she saw: "Kaipa's eyes were open, she was covered in blood. The two unknown men were lying on the steps. One had been shot in the eye."

According to Soltakhanova, Leila described to her what the soldiers had done:

Leila said first her mother was killed, then the two men were killed as they left. Avalu was killed inside the hall. He said, "What are you doing? Why are you killing people?" He was shot, then something inflammable was put on the lower part of his body. The house burned down. We were unable to put out the flames. We took the bodies into the next house.³⁹

Asiat Chaadaeva, a thirty-two-year-old nurse who attempted to help many of the victims on February 5, also went to Sugaipov's house soon after the killings. She confirmed Soltakhanova's account of the scene at Sugaipov's home:

When I entered the yard, I saw Kaipa's body lying by the gates, almost cut in two, face down in a pool of blood. She was on her knees, bent over. The left part of her head was smashed. The bullet wounds were in an arc on her left side. The body almost split in two when I tried to lift it.

Another man, over forty-five, had a large hole in his eye and cheek. He was lying on the stairs, his feet were on the stairs and his head was on the ground, face down. His head had also been burned, his boots and legs were still burning.

In the hall of the house, we found Avalu's body. He was lying on his back, his arms raised . . . His body was burned beyond the fourth degree.

Chaadaeva told Human Rights Watch what Leila had told her about the ordeal:

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The girl cried, "Don't kill me!" and came out from under the bed. A soldier put a scarf over her head and took her under his arm [apparently so she would not see the bodies]. She saw her mother, lying in a pool of blood. The soldier put her down in the street near the neighboring house and gave her a can of beef. He told her to wait there.⁴⁰

Chaadaeva stated that Leila stayed with her for a week after the killings until her relatives came to take her away. She stated that Leila needed injections every night in order to sleep.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

Following her discovery of the killings at Avalu Sugaipov's home, Soltakhanova then went to check on Abdulla and Salamu Magomadov. The Magomadovs' home—which consisted of a two-story house and another, small house in the yard—was located across the street and three houses away from Soltakhanova's. The burning Magomadov home was plainly visible from Soltakhanova's. Soltakhanova told Human Rights Watch that when she arrived at the Magomadovs' she saw that both buildings were burning. "I didn't see any bodies in the yard. I called out for them, but there was no reply. I thought that the soldiers had taken them away. I later learned that their bodies had been burned in the cellar."⁴¹

Asiat Chaadaeva described finding the remains of Abdulla and Salamu Magomadov several days later:

Pensioner Salamu and Abdulla Magomadov were burned along with their house on 162 Mazaeva.⁴² Their house burned for two to three days. We found the jaw bone of Salamu—his lower jaw had his false teeth. We found a knee-bone, spine, and scalp nearby and put the bones into a pan.⁴³

The killings of Gula Khaidae and Rakat Akhmadova

Russian soldiers shot seventy-six-year-old Gula Khaidae and his cousin, eighty-two-year-old Rakat Akhmadova, outside his home at 162 Matasha-Mazaeva Street.

Four witnesses interviewed by a Human Rights Watch researcher saw Khaidae's body shortly after he was killed. Asiat Chaadaeva described seeing his body lying with a head wound on Matasha-Mazaeva Street on February 5, passport in hand; she also said that she saw Akhmadova's body on Matasha-Mazaeva Street and that she had been shot in the neck and in the chest.⁴⁴ Raisa Soltakhanova also came across Khaidae's body and reported that she dragged it into the yard of his home and covered it with slate. She also said he had been shot in the head and that his home had been set on fire.

On February 26, Khaidae's daughter-in-law, Malika Khaidae, returned to Aldi from Ingushetia to check on him. She learned about what had happened from neighbors who said they witnessed the killings. Khaidae told Human Rights Watch what her neighbors had told her:

At 8:00 a.m., my father-in-law's cousin, Rakat Akhmadova, went to visit him. She was shot dead along the way. Gula heard her screams and ran out of his house and was himself shot dead. Our neighbors witnessed the killings. The neighbors said that the ring-bearing fingers on Rakat's hands were severed, her gold teeth extracted and a gold chain she usually wore around her neck was missing.

The soldiers wore scarves on their heads—they were contract soldiers. The neighbors are in shock; they don't want to leave.⁴⁵

The killing of Shamkhan Baigirae

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

⁴² Other sources claim the Magomadovs lived at 158 Matasha-Mazaeva Street.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptsovsk, Ingushetia, March 1, 2000

On February 5, soldiers detained Shamkhan Baigirayev, a thirty-two-year-old man, at his home at 42 First Matasha-Mataeva Lane; they subsequently executed him. When Russian OMON troops returned to Aldi on February 10, they discovered his half-burned body in a cellar on Voronezhskaya Street, across the road from the school. One Aldi resident, Akhmed A. (not his real name), who recovered Baigirayev's body from the cellar, believes Baigirayev was detained because soldiers who detained him found it suspicious that his driver's license was issued in May 1999, during Chechnya's period of de facto independence. Imran I. (not his real name), who buried Baigirayev, told Human Rights Watch that Baigirayev "didn't have his documents when the soldiers came checking. He was taken away, despite the pleas of his relatives. The soldiers took him away just to check. His mother went to the *kommandatura* [command post] to try to find him."⁴⁶

Akhmed A. told Human Rights Watch what he had learned from Baigirayev's mother about the circumstances of Baigirayev's detention:

Soldiers took Baigirayev—his mother and younger brother, Issa, were at home—and led him [away]. His mother followed them, the soldiers fired into the air and scared her away. All she noticed was that they led him away to the right.⁴⁷

According to Akhmed A. and Imran I., on February 10 Russian soldiers returned, began detaining Chechen males, and found Baigirayev's body in the cellar on Voronezhskaya Street. After learning about the body from the soldiers, villagers set about removing it. Among those detained on February 10 was Issa Baigirayev, Shamkhan's younger brother. Akhmed A. told Human Rights Watch:

. . . later, another group of soldiers came with trucks and APCs⁴⁸ and rounded up all the men they could find. They picked up sixteen men, including Issa Baigirayev. His mother started screaming, saying last time, her elder son was taken away and now they were taking her younger one. Then one of the soldiers went up to her brother-in-law's wife and said that the half-burned corpse of Shamkhan was in Anderbek Khamadov's house. His driver's license was there. He received the license in May 1999—when soldiers checked his papers, a soldier said there was no authority in 1999, and that was the reason for his arrest. Akhmed took out the body from the cellar with others.⁴⁹

Issa Baigirayev and the other fifteen men were released that day.

The killing of Rizvan Umkhaev and Issa Akhmadov

Issa Akhmadov, thirty-five, was an Aldi resident who had been released from prison in Russia in mid-1999, reportedly under a general amnesty. He lived on the corner of Matasha-Mazaeva and Kamskaya streets. His friends told Human Rights Watch that since his release, he had not obtained any identity documents, likely due to the fact that the Chechen administration following the first war had not issued passports.⁵⁰ Akhmadov reportedly worried that he would be detained once soldiers arrived in Aldi for not having identity documents and so asked seventy-year-old Rizvan Umkhaev to stay with him, in the belief that Umkhaev's age and concomitant status as an elder would afford him some

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 27, 2000.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

⁴⁸ APC, Armored Personnel Carrier.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Akhmed A., Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

protection. Umkhaev's daughter, Raisa Soltakhanova explained to Human Rights Watch, "He asked my father to stay with him since Rizvan was an old man and he was likely to be respected."⁵¹

Asiat Chaadaeva, a thirty-two-year-old nurse from Aldi, was one of the first to arrive at the scene after the soldiers had left Matasha-Mazaeva Street and discovered the men's bodies. According to Chaadaeva, Umkhaev had his passport in his hand, suggesting that he had been ready to show it to the soldiers. She told Human Rights Watch:

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

I saw Rizvan Umkhaev's body. He had been shot in the chest. There were five or six bullet holes. He was lying on the road on Mazaeva Street. We couldn't wrest the passport out of his hand later due to rigor mortis. There was also the body of a young man, about thirty-five.⁵²

Raisa Soltakhanova and her sister, Luisa Umkhaeva, arrived at about the same time. Soltakhanova told Human Rights Watch:

I then went to Issa's house, which is next to Sultan Timirov's. In the yard I saw Issa's and my father's bodies. They were also face down. I thought that my father had been shot in the face because of the blood. My sister showed me the wound from the top of the head. Issa was also shot in the upper head, he had similar wounds. My father had his passport in his hand.

There was a small store room in the yard which was not burning. My sister and I quickly put the bodies in there. It was too difficult to take the passport, we left it in his hand. My mother was waiting for us at home.⁵³

The killing of Sultan Timirov

Sultan Timirov, about fifty, lived at 170 Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Human Rights Watch is still investigating the circumstances of his death. Several witnesses saw his corpse lying in his yard. It had been decapitated and was torn apart by multiple bullet wounds. Aldi residents searched several days for Timirov's head, but never found it. One of Timirov's next-door neighbors, Akhmed A., told Human Rights Watch that they "identified the body [as Timirov's] by his clothes and documents."⁵⁴

Asiat Chaadaeva, who also saw Timirov's corpse, said that it had been "split into several parts. The bullets went up his spine, we couldn't pick up his body—it was in pieces. My brother, who also saw the body, thought that it had been blown off by a rifle-launched grenade."⁵⁵

These and other witnesses stated that Timirov's house had been set on fire and was still burning when they discovered his body.

The killing of Magomed Gaitaev

Russian contract soldiers shot dead seventy-two-year-old Magomed Gaitaev in front of his home at 140 Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Musa M. (not the man's real name) witnessed the killing. He told Human Rights Watch that he watched from the gates of a nearby house on Matasha-Mazaeva Street as Gaitaev fell after the soldiers had shot him.⁵⁶ A second witness, Akhmed A., who helped bury Gaitaev, stated that he had been shot in the mouth and that the lower part of his face was missing.⁵⁷ Raisa Soltakhanova, who also saw the body, confirmed that he had been shot in the mouth. She told Human Rights Watch:

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptsovsk, Ingushetia, March 6, 2000.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

My sister's brother-in-law, Magomed Gaitaev, . . . was staying in Aldi alone; I went to see him. He had been shot in the mouth, his body was lying outside the gates. He had working gloves on—he was always working, sweeping the yard, repairing something. His roof was damaged on the third [of February], he was repairing it that day. His jaw was broken, he was possibly shot in the side of the mouth. We brought his body into the house.⁵⁸

The killing of Ruslan Mezhidov

Soldiers killed twenty-one-year-old Ruslan Mezhidov, who had been registered as an internally displaced person in Ingushetia and returned to Aldi on January 24 to assist his mother and sister also to leave Chechnya. According to Aina Mezhidova, his mother, the exit routes out of Grozny were blocked in early February, leaving Ruslan trapped in Aldi.

Mezhidova witnessed the murder of her son. She reported to Human Rights Watch that soldiers came to her house on Matasha-Mazaeva Street at 3:20 p.m., after she had returned from the cellar on Second Tsimliansky Lane,⁵⁹ and shot her son dead at close range. The same soldiers knocked her unconscious. Mezhidova told Human Rights Watch:

I went to 140 Matasha-Mazaeva and waited in the house. [Soldiers] asked us to go into the street and wait for the [other] soldiers there. My son stepped out first and the soldiers shot him.

I tried to stop my son, so I could go out first. He didn't listen and went out first. The soldiers said, "Come out with your hands in your pockets." He was shot from two meters near his eye. The bullet exited the back of his head, smashing it. I rushed to my son and a soldier hit me with the butt of his rifle in the neck. I fell unconscious . . . for forty-five minutes.⁶⁰

Mezhidova stated that her neighbors later took her in at a different cellar. That evening, Mezhidova's house was burned down, she believes by the same contract soldiers who shot her son and other Aldi residents.

The killing of Lom-Ali Idigov

Lom-Ali Idigov, about thirty-five, was killed when Russian soldiers forced him into a cellar on Irtyshskaia Street and then tossed a grenade in. Idigov's brother Musa, about forty, was injured in the blast.

Luisa Umkhaeva told Human Rights Watch that Musa Idigov told her about the murder. According to Umkhaeva, Idigov said that Russian soldiers came to the Idigov's home at 3 Irtyshskaia Street, and asked the brothers where their cellar was. Upon learning that there was no cellar in their house, the soldiers took the brothers to a neighbor's house—at 5 Irtyshskaia Street — pushed them into that cellar and threw in two grenades. These grenades killed Lom-Ali outright, while Musa Idigov suffered only a concussion.⁶¹

In a separate interview, Akhmed A., who buried Idigov and fifteen other February 5 victims found on or near Matasha-Mazaeva Street in a temporary grave, gave an account that confirmed what Umkhaeva had told Human Rights Watch. The burials were conducted on February 9.⁶²

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

⁵⁹ There, she witnessed the murders of Isaev, Yakhiaev, and the Russian woman. See below.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

The killing of Khavazh Rasaev

V. (name withheld), a thirty-eight-year-old Aldi resident, saw the body of Khavazh Rasaev, aged about forty-seven, lying on Matasha-Mazaeva Street. V. told Human Rights Watch that Rasaev had three bullet wounds: one to the head and two to the chest. V. stated that Rasaev was shot about fifty meters from V's home. V. told Human Rights Watch:

There were many groups of soldiers. When I heard the shots, I decided not to go home. I stayed at Third Tsimliansky Lane. When Rasaev was shot, I was standing at the intersection of Uralskaia Street and Tsimliansky Lane at about 8:30 a.m. [about 100 meters from where Rasaev was shot] I heard shooting and decided not to go home.⁶³

The killing of Avalu and Bilal Arsamirzoyev⁶⁴

On February 5, soldiers shot two brothers, fifty-four-year-old Avalu Arsamirzoyev and forty-nine-year-old Bilal Arsamirzoyev, on or near Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Luisa Abulkhanova, a neighbor, saw their covered bodies lying in the street. She said she learned from other local residents that a further member of the Arsamirzoyev family, eighteen-year-old Bakar, survived by hiding in a small cellar under the kitchen.⁶⁵

The Area of Voronezhkskaia Street

The killing of Alvi Ganaev, his two sons, Aslanbek and Sulumbek, Ramzan Elmurzaev, Vakha Khakimov, Umar, and Abdurakhman Manaev

Alvi Ganaev (about sixty) and his two sons, Aslanbek (about thirty-four) and Sulumbek (about twenty-nine) were killed by Russian soldiers between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 on the corner of Voronezhskaia and Khoperskaia streets. They apparently were on their way home (they lived at nearby 85 Brianskaia Street) from repairing a roof. Two female members of the family—Malika, about fifty, and Luisa, about thirty-nine—were wounded. Twenty-six-year-old L. witnessed the killings and heard Malika Ganaeva screaming for help. He had taken shelter in a cellar on Brianskaia Street.

Fifteen soldiers came—contract soldiers. There were fifteen on each street—my house is the tenth from the corner. As we came out with our passports, the soldiers opened fire. My neighbors at the beginning of the street, a father and two sons from the Ganaev family, were killed. Two women from the family were wounded. Malika was wounded in the ear.

I was outside, I heard the gunfire and saw them falling and heard Malika screaming, "Please help!" We all ran back to our cellars. The soldiers ordered the people out of the cellars warning that they would throw grenades in. The soldiers swore, saying, "Get out you sons of bitches, we'll kill you all, we have orders." We heard grenades exploding in the cellars up the street. This occurred between 11 a.m. and none.⁶⁶

Aina Mezhidova told Human Rights Watch that she saw the bodies of Alvi Ganaev and his two sons.⁶⁷

The killing of Ramzan Elmurzaev

Both Aina Mezhidova and Asiat Chaadaeva, in separate interviews with Human Rights Watch, said that the same soldiers who killed the Ganaevs later shot and fatally wounded Ramzan Elmurzaev as he helped to drag the

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 27, 2000.

⁶⁴ ***Bilal was also known as Suliman.***

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, March 3, 2000, Nesterovskaia, Ingushetia.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak refugee camp, Ingushetia, March 3, 2000.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptsovsk, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

bodies of the Ganaevs from the street to a nearby yard. Asiat Chaadaeva said that soldiers shot Elmurzaev in the stomach and that he died from internal bleeding in the early hours of February 6.⁶⁸

Yusup Musaev stated that he heard the shots that fatally wounded Ramzan Elmurzaev as he was carrying bodies away that afternoon (see below). Yusup stated that, “At that time I was in the yard, but I heard the shots, but didn't think about it—by then gunfire was a normal sound.”

The discovery of the bodies of Vakha Khakimov and Abdurakhman, Suliman, Yakub, and Umar Musaev

On the morning of February 5, sixty-year-old Yusup Musaev was at a neighbor's house at 122 Voronezhskaia Street. Two of Yusup's nephews, fifty-one-year-old Yakub Musaev and thirty-five-year-old Suliman Musaev, had also been present but left the house that same morning. Yusup Musaev told Human Rights Watch:

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

Aba Maasheva, she is about eighty-years-old and has two nephews, was frightened and came to our house with her fifteen-year-old grandson. She said next to house number 112 there were two dead bodies.⁶⁹

A few minutes later, Musaev told Human Rights Watch, about seven Russian soldiers in camouflage uniforms came to the house and forced Musaev and three others, including the fifteen-year-old boy, to lie face-down in the snow for half an hour while they searched the house. The soldiers warned Musaev not to leave to check on the dead bodies, reportedly saying “if you leave, you’ll end up lying next to them.”

Musaev said that for the next two to three hours, there was continual gunfire, and for that reason he did not dare leave. However, at about 2:00 or 3:00 p.m., Musaev decided to look for his relatives. He walked through the yards of houses and through back ways, emerging on the corner of Voronezhskaia and Khoperskaia Streets. There, he told Human Rights Watch, he saw four bodies in a pile, with one other body in the entrance of 112 Voronezhskaia Street and yet one more nearby. He said that the four bodies in the pile were Alvi, Aslanbek, and Sulumbek Ganaev (see above), along with his cousin, Abdurakhman Musaev. The body of another of Yusup’s cousins, Umar Musaev, was lying in the doorway with the body of Vakha Khakimov lying nearby; they had all been shot.

Thirty-one-year-old Zhanna Mezhidova also saw the body of Khakimov, whom she identified as living on Second Almazny Lane. She told Human Rights Watch:

I saw the body on Voronezhskaia. His name is Vakha . . . about forty-three-years-old. He had been repairing the roof. He was shot in the chest and was covered in blood. The men did not allow women to examine the body and took it into the house so cats and dogs wouldn’t didn’t eat it.⁷⁰

Yusup Musaev stated that he carried away the bodies of Umar, Abdurakhman, and Khakimov with others back to his house on Voronezhskaia Street, while relatives of the Ganaevs’ carried away their bodies. He told Human Rights Watch that he buried Umar and Abdurakhman Musaev in the courtyard of 118 Voronezhskaia Street.

In the late afternoon, Musaev noticed that the house of his brother, Ibragim Musaev, 116 Voronezhskaia Street, was on fire. He told Human Rights Watch that “we tried to put out the fire, but we failed, it was too late. By then it was getting dark, and my nephews were missing, so we went home.”

At about 8:00 p.m, three of Musaev’s neighbors came to his house. They said that they had just found the bodies of Musaev’s nephews, Suliman and Yakub Musaev near 22 Khoperskaia Street and had dragged them to 122 Voronezhskaia Street. Yusup told Human Rights Watch:

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, May 12, 2000.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

I went to see, and took matches so I would be able to see their bodies. They had been shot. Then all of us went out. We were trying to collect bodies, because we were worried the cats and dogs would get to them. I took my nephews back to house number 112. We had no one to dig graves for them, ...and so until February 12 we didn't bury them, but dug a pit and put them there, because we knew they would have to be reburied anyway. We cleaned them a little bit first.⁷¹

Podolskaia Street: The killing of five members of the Estamirov family

Russian soldiers shot dead five members of the Estamirov family at 1 Podolskaia Street, about ten minutes' walk from central Aldi: sixty-seven-year-old Khasmagomed Estamirov, his son, thirty-seven-year-old Khozh-Akhmed Estamirov, the latter's wife, twenty-nine-year-old Toita Estamirova, who was eight months pregnant, her one-year-old son, Khassan Estamirov, and Khasmagomed Estamirov's cousin, fifty-year-old Saidakhmed Masarov. Human Rights Watch researchers spoke at length to the surviving members of the family who were not in Chechnya at the time of the killings. They related in detail what two other relatives who discovered the killings had in turn told them. They said the latter are too afraid to leave Chechnya to speak about what happened. The daughter of Khasmagomed Estamirov, Leila Yandareva, traveled to Chechnya to attend the reburial of her family members' bodies. She gave Human Rights Watch researchers copies of the reburial photographs.

V. (name withheld) is a family member who discovered the bodies and told his brother, Sultan S. (not the man's true name) what he saw. Sultan S. related this account to Human Rights Watch. According to Sultan S., V. stated that on February 4, the Estamirov's Russian neighbors were killed when their house took a direct hit at approximately midday during the last hours of the shelling of Aldi.⁷² Sultan S. said that, believing the fighting to be over, the Estamirov family was happy on February 5 that they had managed to survive. That morning, conscript soldiers came to their home and checked their passports. These conscripts reportedly warned that the group of soldiers following them was extremely severe—"they are like beasts"—and advised the Estamirovs to be very careful.

That afternoon, V., along with four other male friends went to the central Minutka district of Grozny to search for food and water. On the way back, V. asked his companions to accompany him to check on the Estamirov home. V. reportedly stated that upon coming closer to Aldi, they heard gunshots. As they approached Podolskaia Street, they saw the Estamirov house in flames and a Russian army armored personnel carrier leaving the corner of Podolskaia. They discovered that the entire two-story house and the family car were in flames.

V. found the bodies of his father, Khasmagomed, brother, Khozh-Akhmed, lying close together in the yard. V. reportedly told Sultan S. that Khasmagomed Estamirov had many bullet wounds to his chest. The bodies were burnt but recognizable, with bullet wounds still visible. According to Sultan S., V. then saw the bodies of Toita Estamirova and her one-year-old son, Khassan, under the awning in the yard. V. allegedly stated that Khassan had two or three bullet wounds to the head, while Toita had bullet wounds to the stomach and chest. V. found the body of Said-Akhmed Masarov, half-burning, lying across the doorway to the house.

V. allegedly told Sultan S. that with the help of his companions, he put out the flames on the bodies and quickly dug a temporary grave, fearful that the soldiers would return. Sultan stated that V. has since suffered a nervous breakdown and remains in Grozny, too afraid to travel. The family told Human Rights Watch that three days after one of their relatives gave an interview to the Russian service of Radio Liberty on March 8, soldiers returned to Podolskaia Street looking for them.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Sultan S., Nazran, Ingushetia, March 19, 2000. The victims were fifty-year-old Tolik Smirnov, his forty-seven-year-old wife, Olga, and their daughter Valya, aged about twenty-five. V. said Tolik Smirnov's seventy-year-old mother, Nadia, happened to be out at the time and so survived.

A second family relative, B. (name withheld), with whom Leila Yandareva also spoke, gave a description of the killings that closely corresponded to the account provided by Sultan S.

Tsimlianskaia Street and environs

The killing of Khampash Yakhiaev, Musa Yakhiaev, and Elena Kuznetsova

At around 1:00 p.m., soldiers killed forty-two-year-old Khampash Yakhiaev and his cousin, forty-eight-year-old Musa Yakhiaev, and an eighty-year-old Russian woman whose name is believed to be Elena Kuznetsova, as they emerged from a cellar on Second Tsimliansky Lane.

Fifty-three-year-old Aina Mezhidova witnessed the murders, and described to Human Rights Watch the appearance of the soldiers as being between thirty-five and forty years of age, with some wearing headscarves and others in masks. She stated that they were all wearing either grey or green military camouflage uniforms.

At approximately 1:00 p.m., Mezhidova was with the Yakhiaevs, Kuznetsova, and a Chechen woman named Koka and her daughter Nurzhan, in the cellar on Second Tsimliansky Lane. Mezhidova told Human Rights Watch what happened when the soldiers arrived:

Six soldiers came into their yard. . . . Koka left first. She greeted the soldiers, saying “Good morning.” Koka thought that the soldiers would respect her age, so she went first, but a soldier swore and hit her with his rifle and kicked her and she fell back down into the cellar. I saw her fall back into the cellar.

When Koka fell, [Kuznetsova] went out [as well as] Khampash and Musa. The soldiers checked their passports. Khampash asked why the soldiers swore at an old woman and why they hit her. Then the soldiers killed all three. I was just about to come out of the cellar when I saw a soldier killing Khampash. I ran back into the cellar and left through a second exit. Khampash was shot in the head from close range. Khampash was killed first, then Musa and then [Kuznetsova]. She had lived in Aldi for forty years.⁷³

Khampash Yakhiaev's mother-in-law, Zina Yakhiaeva, saw the bodies of the three victims that same day. She told Human Rights Watch:

On the fifth . . . I entered my son-in-law's house. I saw the bodies of my son-in-law and his friend, Musa, lying under the awning. My son-in-law's hands were bound with wire, he had been shot in the head, shot straight in the face, in the eyes. A young man took photographs. Musa had the same wounds, his head was smashed.

There was a Russian woman . . . with them in the cellar . . . The soldiers killed her and burned her body in the cellar. There is a bad smell coming from the cellar. She was first shot and then burned . . . Their heads were smashed—they had multiple bullet wounds to the head.

Nurzhan, Musa's cousin and Koka, Musa's aunt, gave me the men's passports. They found them in the men's mouths. The passports were clean, I think they were first shot and then the soldiers put their passports in their mouths.⁷⁴

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptovsk, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Republican Hospital, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 4, 2000.

Having left the cellar, Aina Mezhidova then ran to Matasha-Mazaeva Street to tell other people about what she had just witnessed. On the way to her house, she saw the dead bodies of several other Aldi residents. She told Human Rights Watch:

I then ran to Matasha-Mazaeva to tell people what had happened. I ran by the body of Koka [who was about forty], a drug store salesperson on Matasha-Mazaeva. She had been shot in the stomach, her intestines were hanging out. Then I saw Akhmed Abulkhanov outside his home on Mazaeva [Street].⁷⁵

The killing of Lema Akhtaev and Issa Akhmatov

Thirty-two-year-old Lema Akhtaev and forty-one-year-old Issa Akhmatov had been staying at the home of thirty-seven-year-old Ramzan Tsanaev, believed to be on Fourth Tsimliansky Lane. Aldi residents believe they found the burned remains of both men in the house next door, which had been torched.

Akhmed A. told Human Rights Watch that Tsanaev was not at home when the soldiers came to his house. He stated that when Tsanaev returned, he found the Akhtaev's and Akhmatov's passports on the kitchen table.⁷⁶

Asiat Chaadava had previously treated Akhtaev for a shrapnel wound from shellfire and Akhmatov for an axe wound to his finger. As she learned about what was happening in Aldi that day, she grew concerned about both men and asked her brother, Timur, to go see how the two men were doing. She told Human Rights Watch what Timur told her upon his return:

Ramzan told Timur that Lema and Issa were taken away by soldiers...⁷⁷ Timur [disagreed], and said the soldiers didn't take anyone away and that we had to look for them in burned houses. We went to a house next door which was burned and started to take off the rubble. We didn't find anything that day, but there was a smell of burnt flesh.

Timur went there on February 6 and found the bodies. He found keys from a safe and recognized these as Lema's. He continued digging and found a piece of a burned body, the lower part of the spine with some flesh attached. This was Lema's. Nearby he found a skeleton and parts of bones.⁷⁸

Killings in Chernorechie

Chernorechie is an adjacent neighborhood to Aldi, linked by a road that runs over the reservoir dam. Chernorechie was shelled much more heavily than Aldi, and a number of families sent their elderly relatives to Aldi to shelter. Groups of OMON police and federal troops conducted passport checks in Chernorechie on February 5 and also summarily executed civilians there. Human Rights Watch has information concerning five victims of summary execution from Chernorechie that day.

The killing of Salman ("Avkhan") and Amkhad Bishaev⁷⁹

On February 11, residents of Chernorechie found the bodies of a father and son, fifty-four-year old Salman, and Amkhad, aged twenty-eight. The pair were last seen alive on February 5, when Russian soldiers detained a number of men in that area. Salman's sister, forty-two-year-old Elizaveta Bishaeva, found the men's documents in the family's home on Kislovodskaia Street in Chernorechie the day they disappeared. She told Human Rights Watch that she had been looking for her brother and nephew for several days, searching through houses, traveling to the Russian military base at Khankala, asking at the local military command post at the Thirty-Sixth District, and also traveling to Urus

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

⁷⁷ *Zelenka*, literally, "little green," refers to a green antibiotic ointment, commonly used in first aid in Russia.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁷⁹ *Salman was known among family and friends as Avkhan.*

Martan. Bishaeva told Human Rights Watch she discovered her brother's and nephew's bodies at 3 Kislovodskaiia Street the day she returned to Chernorechie:

I found them after I had come back from Urus Martan. They were in the first house, on Kislovodskaiia at the corner with the main street. Our house is two or three down, on the other side of the street. They were shot there. They had put aluminum roofing sheeting on top of them, to hide them. My sisters had checked that yard three times.⁸⁰

Bishaeva said that three women she did not know well discovered the bodies. Bishaeva told Human Rights Watch that these women:

. . . didn't look, but one of the women came to me and said a corpse had been found. When I came close the two other women didn't want to let me in, they were afraid something might happen to me. We called my nephews, and we all ran over there, at the same time. My nephew saw his cap, and took off the [sheeting] . . . They were holding each others' arms. They probably shot my nephew first, my brother's expression was very scared. They had pulled or beaten out my brother's gold teeth. Then later, when they washed the body, they saw his leg was broken, he had been beaten severely.⁸¹

Khavazh Kedirov, a fifty-three-year-old Aldi resident, confirmed the killing of Salman and Amkhad Bishaev and discounts the theory that they could have been killed by shellfire. He told Human Rights Watch that:

A father and son who lived in my neighborhood—Avkhan and his son—went missing on February 5. Their documents were still in their house along with their clothes . . . On about February 11, their bodies were found in the backyard on a neighboring street—their bodies were under rubble. They had been shot. I saw the bodies, but I didn't take part in the washing. The father's gold teeth had been pulled out . . . Avkhan was not killed by shrapnel . . . there was no shelling on the evening of the fourth [of February]—these people were still alive in the evening. I spoke to them when I went to get some water on the evening of the fourth.⁸²

Later, with the help of relatives, Bishaeva took the bodies of her brother and nephew for burial in Aldi.

RAPE

*The soldiers took the girl into an empty house and sometime later they returned her, saying "Hide this bitch somewhere . . . More soldiers are coming after us, they will kill and rape her anyway." She was seventeen or eighteen. This is not the only case; a married woman was also raped. But people keep it a secret, they say she was not raped because it causes such great shame. People just don't speak about it.*⁸³

Of all the violations Human Rights Watch researchers uncovered in Aldi on February 5, incidences of rape were by far the hardest to document in any great detail. Chechen society has strong taboos against revealing instances of sexual assault. Chechnya's Muslim culture and national traditions strictly regulate relations between men and women, and inappropriate behavior is subject to severe and often violent sanctions: for example the use of sexually

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, May 15, 2000.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Zapiat (surname withheld), Ingushetia, February 22, 2000.

explicit language in front of women is considered gravely offensive. Unmarried rape survivors are unlikely to be able to marry, and married women who are raped are likely to be divorced or simply abandoned by their husbands. This cultural taboo compounds the pain for the rape victim, leaving her to suffer in silence for fear of social ostracization.

Despite this taboo, women spoke to Human Rights Watch researchers about the rape cases they had heard about in Aldi on February 5.⁸⁴ In relating their accounts, we have omitted exact street names and omitted the names of the victims in order to preserve their anonymity. Under Protocol II additional to the Geneva Convention, rape is considered a war crime. There have been several indictments and prosecutions of rape at the international criminal tribunals following the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The Rape of S.F.

When soldiers came to the home of S.F. in Aldi, they reportedly demanded money and jewelry from the residents. When they left, the soldiers reportedly forcibly took S.F. away with them in an armored personnel carrier. One witness, who requested anonymity, told Human Rights Watch that she was among a group of women who went to look for S.F. after she had been hauled away.

We found her lying on the edge of Aldi—her hair was in a mess; there was blood coming out of the corner of her mouth. We heard that S.F. was raped but she herself denied it. Her clothes were torn. I was shocked by what I saw. When we found her, we were afraid that the soldiers would return and we went back to the house on X [location withheld] Street. We [had her stay] in a cellar with other women.⁸⁵

A second witness, who also requested anonymity, stated that she visited S.F. She told Human Rights Watch that she went to see her that night and that “it would have been better for her to die; she didn’t move and was covered by a blanket, lying still.”⁸⁶

The Reported Rape of X and Three Other Women

Human Rights Watch has received reports of the gang rape of four women, the subsequent murder of three of them, and the attempted murder of the fourth. The rape and murder victims were thirty-five, thirty-two, and twenty-nine. On February 9, the survivor, “X,” was found by her relative, “Y,” who related the story of the ordeal to another female relative, “W.” Human Rights Watch spoke at length with “W.” According to W, Y. told her that she had discovered not only the survivor but also the three women’s dead bodies. Y. currently resides in Chechnya, and is too afraid to travel to Ingushetia. The rape survivor is reportedly recovering with relatives outside of Chechnya. The entire account below is drawn from Human Rights Watch’s interview with W.⁸⁷

According to her account, Y. said when she traveled to Aldi on February 9 to check on her relatives, she discovered her relative, in a deeply distressed state, taking shelter in a cellar near her family home. She said she was told that on February 5, at around 12:00 noon, her relative had, with three other women, gone to check on their homes in the upper part of Aldi. The four were then seized by Russian contract soldiers, aged between forty and fifty with shaven heads and beards, two of whom were wearing headscarves, who reportedly raped the women in turn. There were twelve men and “many” of them raped the women. She stated that the women were also orally raped. One woman allegedly died from suffocation when a soldier sat on her head. Soldiers strangled two others when they screamed.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 3, 2000.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Yandirka, Ingushetia, March 2, 2000.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, location withheld. March 15, 2000.

When she herself was orally raped, she said she lost consciousness. But later she heard the soldiers shout, "She's dead! She died as well." The soldiers then left.

Our source described the woman's condition as described to her when Y found her relative:

Her hair was everywhere, she was bruised, her neck was dirty and her genital area was bloodied. She vomited. [My relative] went back to my father's house and brought some foodstuffs. The victim didn't recognize [her]. She screamed, "Get away," she was hysterical [screaming] "Don't touch me, get away!"

The victim's eyes were rolled back; her eyes were pointing upwards. [My relative] poured water in her mouth and she vomited it back up. The victim was lying down; when she saw Y., she again screamed "Don't touch me!" She then came to, screamed, and cried.⁸⁸

The woman then found the bodies of the three murdered women in the yard. She and another man buried their bodies in a shallow grave.

The Reported Rape of "Zina"

Aina Mezhidova helped to wash the bodies of some of the female victims of the February 5 massacre and also of those killed during the shelling of Aldi. She told Human Rights Watch that a nineteen-year-old girl, "Zina" (not her real name), who helped her wash one of the shelling victims told her that she had been raped "many times" and was taken "from yard to yard." Mezhidova told Human Rights Watch that the victim had been staying with a male relative in Aldi who was not at home when the soldiers came.⁸⁹

ARSON AND PILLAGE

The soldiers pointed at the burning houses and said "We will destroy all of Chechnya this way. You see your city? We'll flatten Chechnya."
Aldi resident

On February 8, in the afternoon, they came to my house at 116 Voronezhskaia Street. They looted everything – I saw it with my own eyes . . . They took the TV, my tape player, and my wife's kitchen appliances, vases—anything they liked. They took my brother's things as well.
Aldi resident

On February 5, Russian contract soldiers deliberately torched many homes that belonged to Chechen civilians in Aldi. Witness after witness told Human Rights Watch in interviews, conducted separately and in private, that they either had seen Russian soldiers deliberately set fire to their homes or property or returned home to find their homes on fire or burned to the ground. Some of the acts of arson seem to be primitive attempts to destroy evidence of summary executions and other civilian killings. Soldiers also torched the homes of the people found without proper documents, in what seems to be revenge on those they believed might have harbored rebel fighters. In one incident, the arson itself appears to have been a murder attempt.

While soldiers engaged in some pillage on February 5, pillage on a massive scale took place during the next week. Witnesses stated that on the days following the massacre they heard Russian military trucks driving into Aldi at night to load looted goods. Others stated that soldiers returned in large numbers on February 10 in broad daylight and brazenly stripped their homes of valuables. The looting that took place in Aldi was not an isolated incident of such

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, location withheld, March 15, 2000.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

misconduct by Russian forces in Chechnya: since the beginning of the Chechen conflict, Russian troops have been systematically looting villages and towns under their control, and there is no evidence that the Russian command has taken any steps to prevent it.⁹⁰

Arson

Three witnesses described in detail to Human Rights Watch how Russian soldiers carried canisters of inflammable liquid that they used to burn down civilian homes and property. Asiat Chaadaeva saw soldiers burn down two homes on Fourth Almazny Lane, which belonged to the Kuzhaev and Akhmadov family. She described to Human Rights Watch how soldiers questioned her and her family, threatening to mark their foreheads with a green antibiotic to “make it easier to shoot them,” before she watched the soldiers burn down two houses on Fourth Almazny Lane. She told Human Rights Watch:

⁹⁰ See Human Rights Watch release, “Looting Underway in Russian-controlled Areas of Chechnya: Russian Soldiers Stripping Homes Bare,” November 24, 1999. Pillage is banned by international humanitarian law. Article 4 of Protocol II additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, protects, among other things, civilian immunity in internal armed conflicts. Article 4(2) forbids pillage.

The soldiers had small white canisters, made of thick plastic. They poured liquid from it on houses, on Kuzhaev's house, at 4 Fourth Almazny Lane and on Akhmadov's house, number 6 on the same street. The soldiers said they would burn all the empty houses that were locked.⁹¹

Chaadaeva said that her elder brother, Timur, was ordered to stand behind the commander as he walked down the street, to cover him from sniper fire. Chaadaeva and her father went with the soldiers, fearful of what might happen to Timur and worried that the soldiers would burn down more houses. She told Human Rights Watch that she and her father followed soldiers to 13 Fourth Almazny Lane and saw a soldier trying to get permission from his commanding officer to burn down the house. The house belonged to a wealthy family and contained a large amount of canned food. She stated that:

My father was worried that the soldiers would burn the house down. He said that the food was humanitarian aid. The soldier who wanted to mark our foreheads asked the commander to let him burn down the house, and took off the cap of the container. The commander kicked him away.⁹²

Sultan S. told Human Rights Watch that he saw Russian soldiers burn five homes during the day on February 5 on Tsimliansky Lane and Tsimlianskaia Street. He believed the soldiers chose to burn the most prosperous, unoccupied homes.

I personally saw five houses being burnt this way. We managed to put out the fire twice. The soldiers usually waited until the fire was too big to be put out before leaving. They did it deliberately, especially if it was difficult to get in somewhere.

From Tsimlianskaia Street, the soldiers went to Third Tsimliansky Lane. I saw the house on the corner, the Labazanovs', was burning. I ran there several times to make sure the fire wouldn't spread. Each time I saw soldiers waiting outside for the fire to catch.⁹³

Around 10:00 a.m., Russian soldiers were burning homes on Kamskaia Street, including the home of Usam Akhmadov, and on Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Akhmed A. and "M." (name withheld), whom Human Rights Watch interviewed separately and in private, stated that they had been together when they witnessed these acts of arson. Akhmed A. described in detail to Human Rights Watch what he saw:

I heard a crackling sound and couldn't understand whether it was gunfire or roof slates crackling [in the fire]. It was Usam Akhmadov's house burning on Kamskaia Street. About thirty soldiers were on the corner of Matasha-Mazaeva Street in different positions. Some were lying down, others were standing. They were burning the house—they had red bottles in their hands and sprayed liquid from the bottles onto the house which seemed to spontaneously ignite.

The same soldiers torched Akhmed A.'s house, while he and M. were in it. According to Akhmed A., the soldiers had noticed him watching from about fifty meters away as the soldiers torched the homes on Matasha-Mazaeva Street. He and M. ran back to Akhmed A.'s house on Matasha-Mazaeva Street and hid in a secret hiding place they had prepared in the foundations of the house. Akhmed A. told Human Rights Watch that ten minutes later he heard about ten soldiers come into his house. He could hear them talking overhead and heard one of them tell the other to burn his car.

A few minutes later, he heard a spraying sound and described what he smelled:

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Kantyshevo, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

[It was] a strong chemical smell like gasoline, perhaps. The soldiers left the house and ten of them were in the yard. They opened the gates and set the house alight with their guns, ready to shoot anyone who came out. We crawled under the floor into the bedroom and broke through the floor. I had three blankets which we wrapped around ourselves and jumped out the window—the bedroom was on fire. We stayed under the awning watching the house and garage burn. We saw the soldiers outside—we stayed until the roof fell in and then left. The whole incident took twenty minutes.⁹⁴

Akhmed A. claims that Russian soldiers burned around one hundred homes in Aldi, principally on Matasha-Mazaeva Street. Akhmed A. said that after dark on February 5, once the soldiers had left, he and others went through the streets of Aldi putting out fires and picking up dead bodies.

Pillage

Following the February 5 massacre, Russian soldiers returned to Aldi on numerous occasions to loot homes. Human Rights Watch interviewed multiple witnesses to the looting. Forty-one-year-old Zapiat Z. (not the woman's true name) stated that she saw two separate groups of soldiers looting homes in Aldi on February 9 when she was returning home from helping to wash and prepare a body for burial. She told Human Rights Watch:

When I was coming back from washing Zina's body, I saw soldiers loading looted things on to a truck on Voronezhskaia Street on February 9. My daughter accompanied me when we went to wash the bodies. When we came back it was 3:30 p.m. I saw two APCs and the soldiers taking out things and loading them. When the soldiers noticed us two women, they shot in the air. My daughter and I ran away quickly because the soldiers always killed witnesses.

After this incident, I was scared to go out again and I refused to go to wash other bodies, even when I was asked. When we were running down Voronezhskaia Street and reached the crossing with Khoperskaia Street, we saw two APCs on one side and two APCs on the other side, also loading things. Fortunately, the soldiers didn't notice us.⁹⁵

Aina Mezhidova told Human Rights Watch that she witnessed soldiers looting goods from homes on Brianskaia and Khoperskaia Streets:

I saw soldiers taking things from [the] Albostuv and Khatuev [homes] on Brianskaia Street. On February 6 or 7, they came on Ural⁹⁶ military trucks and loaded things and left. They sometimes came during the day, like on the seventh of February when they came to Khavazhi Torzaev's house on Khoperskaia Street. They took two televisions, a video recorder, and furniture. The five brothers who lived in their compound were wealthy and their homes were looted.⁹⁷

V. (name withheld) himself saw soldiers looting openly on February 10 for more than two hours. V. was one of the first of sixteen men to be detained that day (see above) when soldiers returned for document checks. He was detained in a truck that was used to haul away looted items:

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, February 22, 2000.

⁹⁶ Ural, a large truck commonly used by the Russian military.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Sleptovsk, Ingushetia, March 18, 2000.

The soldiers made me and fifteen other men get into a Ural truck. While we sat there, there were already several carpets in it. We were guarded by soldiers. The soldiers went slowly with us in the truck along the street. If the gates of a house were locked, they broke it open with a pick-axe or kicked it open. They did it openly. Women were walking and relatives of the men went along crying asking the soldiers to release us. It happened around 12 noon. While we went along the street, they detained men as well as stole goods. When I was detained there were three others. There were three Urals, several UAZ [minibuses], and an APC.⁹⁸ They looted in front of women and old men. In Rasaev's two-story house, they took ten microwave ovens, several carpets, kitchen utensils, dishes. The looting went on for two hours.⁹⁹

Raisa Soltakhanov also witnessed the looting on February 10. She stated that the soldiers returned that day and "went through houses on Matasha-Mazaeva Street, taking whatever they liked. I saw soldiers removing things and loading them onto a truck."¹⁰⁰

Yusup Musaev told Human Rights Watch that on the afternoon of February 8, soldiers returned and looted goods from his home at 116 Voronezhskaia Street. He told Human Rights Watch:

They looted everything, I saw it with my own eyes. That was after lunch, before sunset. They took the TV, my tape player, and my wife's kitchen appliances, vases, anything they liked. They took my brother's things as well.¹⁰¹

THE RESPONSE OF THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

A man came, calling himself an investigator from the military procuracy. I decided not to talk to him— it's no use . . . He had guards in white and blue camouflage uniforms around him. I couldn't bear to see soldiers at that time and even more than that, an investigator from the procuracy.

Aldi survivor

A full appraisal of the Russian authorities' investigation into the Aldi massacre would be premature, since the investigation appears to be ongoing. When news of the massacre first broke in early February, Russian authorities issued a blanket denial, although an investigation got underway several weeks later. An ongoing investigation is reportedly currently being handled by the civilian procuracy, which as of this writing has indicted no one in relation to the massacre at Aldi. No commander or serviceman was suspended from duty pending the outcome of the investigation.

There are reliable reasons for concern about the nature of the Russian investigative effort. First, there is no political commitment to justice for abuses in Chechnya. Instead, the government has a long record of denying abuses and assailing the credibility of those who bring forth reliable information about them. Not a single soldier, officer, or military commander faced prosecution for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during the Chechen war of 1994 to 1996, nor have any been prosecuted for some of the heinous crimes committed in Chechnya prior to February 5, 2000. Second, investigative agencies are taking none of the necessary steps to ensure the cooperation and trust of Aldi residents, who want justice but now deeply fear and mistrust Russian law enforcement agencies.

⁹⁸ UAZ, a small minibus, used by the military and police.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 27, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 17, 2000.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, May 12, 2000.

The Russian Authorities' Public Response to the Aldi Massacre

The Russian government's initial public response to news of the massacre in Aldi—the third known major massacre of Chechen civilians by Russian soldiers in the conflict— was to deny anything had occurred.¹⁰² Typical of the military's public response to the initial Human Rights Watch press release on the Aldi killings— “More than Sixty Civilians Murdered in Chechen Capital,” of February 23, 2000— was the following statement, attributed to Deputy Commander of the Russian Interior Ministry Troops Lieutenant General Stanislav Kavun, by Interfax news agency on February 24:

These assertions are nothing but a concoction not supported by fact or any proof. The statements from this human rights organization, based solely on verbal accounts from unnamed witnesses, should be seen as a provocation whose goal is to discredit the federal forces' operation against the terrorists in Chechnya.¹⁰³

The Procuracy Investigation

On March 10, Human Rights Watch staff met with the military procurator of the Russian Federation, Yury Diomin.¹⁰⁴ During that meeting, Diomin stated that he had “never heard of Aldi” and that he regretted “the time I have wasted” investigating reports of human rights abuses by international organizations. He also accused refugees of spreading “fairy tales” about abuses committed by Russian forces in Chechnya.

Aldi residents paint an altogether different picture, and told Human Rights Watch researchers that at least two investigative groups, one from the Federal Security Service (FSB)¹⁰⁵ and the other from the military procuracy itself, had visited Aldi by March 10. On April 19, Vladimir Kalamonov, the presidential special representative on Chechnya, told Human Rights Watch that three prosecutors were investigating the Aldi massacre and that their findings should be available within two months.¹⁰⁶

By the end of March, the military procuracy announced that it found that no crimes had been committed by servicemen under its jurisdiction and transferred the case to the civilian procuracy. In an April 21 reply to a leading Russian human rights group, Memorial, the North Caucasus Military Procuracy denied that Russian Ministry of Defense or Interior Ministry troops were involved in the Aldi killings. The acting deputy procurator, S.G. Dolzhenko wrote that in the course of the military procuracy's investigation, they established that:

The so-called “mop-up” operation in the village of Aldi on February 5 and 10, 2000 was undertaken by OMON units of the city of St. Petersburg and Riazan province, which are not under the supervision of the military procurator.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See, for example, “No Happiness Remains” and “Civilian Killings in the Staropromyslovsky District of Grozny”

¹⁰³ Interfax news agency, Moscow, February 24, 2000.

¹⁰⁴ The military procuracy has jurisdiction for investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by Ministry of Defense troops and by Internal Affairs Troops, which are under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

¹⁰⁵ In Russian, Federalnaia Sluzhba Bezopasnosti, the successor agency to the KGB.

¹⁰⁶ Meeting between Vladimir Kalamonov and Human Rights Watch staff, Moscow, April 19, 2000. In a May 30 letter to Human Rights Watch, Kalamonov's office stated that the only Russian forces present in Aldi on February 5 were OMON units.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from acting deputy procurator of the Military Procuracy of the North Caucasus, S.G. Dolzhenko to Oleg Orlov,

Dolzhenko wrote that the military procuracy passed on details of the case to the civilian Grozny city procurator.

At the very least that body appears to recognize the gravity of the crimes committed at Aldi. Reportedly, for each of at least thirteen victims of the massacre, it has allegedly issued individual informal certificates stating that a criminal investigation was underway. In May, Human Rights Watch researchers obtained a copy of one of these thirteen certificates, which are little more than undated slips of paper. Notably, the language on the certificates makes it clear that Ministry of Defense troops as well as police are implicated in the massacre. The slip reads:

CERTIFICATE

On February 5, 2000, the mass murder of civilians took place during a passport inspection by sub-units of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation in the village of New Aldi, Zavadskoi district, Grozny. Included among the victims was:

Khadzhimuradov, Alvi Germanovich, born in 1942

Accordingly, the General Office of the Procurator General of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus is conducting an investigation.

T.A. Murdalov
Investigator for Especially Important Matters
General Office of the General Procurator of the Russian Federation of the North Caucasus

These certificates were reportedly given to close relatives of the victims who agreed to allow Russian authorities to exhume their deceased relatives' graves. The legal purpose of the certificates remains unclear.

Aldi Residents' Reaction to Russian Investigators

Russian authorities have not taken any measures to gain the trust of local residents who have much to fear in speaking to Russian law enforcement agencies. Witnesses to the crimes in Aldi interviewed by Human Rights Watch researchers exhibited great fear and reluctance to speak openly about what they have witnessed. Several interviewees who were crucial witnesses told Human Rights Watch that they maintained silence or gave incomplete information when Russian investigators came to Aldi to question them, precisely because they were too afraid to speak openly. Indeed, some witnesses interpreted repeated questioning by Russian military procurators as to whether they would recognize the soldiers as a direct threat to their lives: soldiers had returned to Aldi several days after the massacre not only to loot, but to directly threaten residents with reprisals should they speak out about what they witnessed.

The arrival of Russian investigators ended a wait of several days by the relatives of the victims for someone from the outside to acknowledge what had taken place. However, the appearance of armed Russian military investigators with armed military escorts served to intimidate and deter witnesses from coming forward and relating what they know. Further, there has been no public pledge by the Russian authorities of protection to potential witnesses to encourage them to come forward, and it is unlikely that any provisions have been made for witness protection.

One Aldi resident who requested anonymity stated that on February 14, the first investigators came to Aldi. These investigators reportedly said they were from the FSB. This witness told Human Rights Watch:

On February 14, a commission came and introduced themselves as members of the FSB. One was Chechen, "Ruslan." They came at 9:00 a.m. and for six hours they carried out an investigation on our

Chair of Memorial, a Russian human rights organization, April 21, 2000.

block. They filmed graves, questioned witnesses, and were surprised saying “this could not have happened.” I noticed that people were afraid to talk about their close relatives who had been killed.

[The men from the FSB] took me aside in the street and questioned me at 11:00 a.m. . . . They asked whether fighters were there, if parachute bombs were dropped on Aldi, what the soldiers on the fifth were asking, and which emblems were on their uniforms. They asked if I remembered the number plates on the APCs and whether we would recognize them. This was the most frightening question.¹⁰⁸

This same witness stated that another investigative group came two days later, on February 16, reportedly from Mozdok. The witness stated that they were looking for a passport and were there to investigate crimes committed on February 5. This witness stated that the investigators talked with a group of Aldi residents on Voronezhskaya Street near Aldi’s polyclinic, reportedly asking them why they did not want to hand over the passport allegedly belonging to one of the soldiers involved in the February 5 killings, and asking why “people don’t want to tell the truth.”¹⁰⁹

This witness stated that a third investigative group came on March 19, some of whom were also FSB officers. The witness stated that these officers allegedly asked a number of different questions:

They recorded my voice on a tape, what the soldiers shouted, what names they used, what tattoos, would I recognize their faces. They stressed, “Were they Russians? Were they not disguised fighters?”

I said that I wouldn’t recognize the soldiers. They asked me if I said this because I am scared. I replied only that they had fair hair and blue eyes.¹¹⁰

A different witness, who also requested anonymity, told Human Rights Watch that:

Two men, two meters tall, with thick necks in military uniform came several times to Aldi, I think they were pretending to be journalists. They were asking for witnesses, [they had] tape recorders, pistols, and armed guards. I saw them on February 12 and 15, but didn’t speak to them. I recognized the voices of the soldiers, the guards of the journalists, to be the same as those who came into my house on February 5.¹¹¹

A third witness, speaking under guarantee of anonymity, stated that around February 14, an investigator from the military procuracy came to Aldi. This witness told Human Rights Watch that:

A man came, calling himself an investigator from the military procuracy. I decided not to talk to him, it’s no use . . . He had guards in white and blue camouflage uniforms around him. I couldn’t bear to see soldiers at that time and even more than that, an investigator from the procuracy.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Ingushetia, March 23, 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 5, 2000.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview, Karabulak, Ingushetia, March 27, 2000.

Following the massacre, Aldi residents collectively decided not to bury the bodies immediately, as would be appropriate according to Muslim tradition, but to instead to keep the victims' bodies inside homes so their deaths could be documented.

A French correspondent who traveled to Aldi on March 25 told Human Rights Watch that the people of Aldi were frightened by the investigators' questions, and moreover that they feared the soldiers may return.¹¹³

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Nazran, Ingushetia, March 25, 2000.

On April 25, the United Nations passed a resolution calling for the formation of an independent national commission of inquiry to investigate alleged war crimes in Chechnya. There are already two Russian commissions in existence whose ostensible purpose is to investigate war crimes in Chechnya. The first is a Duma commission headed by deputy Alexander Tkachev, composed of members of the Russian State Duma, the second, a purportedly independent commission, is headed by Pavel Krasheninnikov, a former minister of justice, and is composed of a variety of Duma deputies, journalists and other figures.¹¹⁴ At the time of this writing neither commission has approached either Human Rights Watch or Memorial, two of the leading authorities on human rights abuses during the current conflict, for information.

¹¹⁴ This commission, known formally as the National Public Commission for the Investigation of Violations of the Law and Observance of Human Rights in the North Caucasus (in Russian, Natsionalnaia obshchestvennaia komissia po rassledovaniu pravonarushenii i sobliudeniю prav cheloveka na severnom kavkaze) is composed of the following persons:

Pavel Krasheninnikov, chair; Aleksandr Urmanov, executive secretary; Ella Alexandrovna Pamfilova, the leader of the Civic Dignity Party (in Russian, Dvizhenie za grazhdanstvennoe dostoinstvo); Vladimir Zorin, the deputy leader of the executive committee of the Our Home is Russia party; Mikhail Kozhokin, the chief editor of Izvestia newspaper; Yury Polekov, a writer; Vladimir Rashnikov, the general director of a private company, "Magnetogorsky Metalurgichesky Kombinat"; and Eduard Khachukaev, the president of the Diatex company.

LIST OF VICTIMS KILLED ON FEBRUARY 5, 2000 IN ALDI, CHERNORECHIE AND ENVIRONS¹¹⁵

No.	Name	Age	Address
1.	Abdulmezhidov, Khussein Magomedovich	aged forty-seven	20 Third Tsimliansky Lane
2.	Abdulmezhidova, Zina Magomedovna	aged sixty	20 Third Tsimliansky Lane
3.	Abulkhanov, Akhmed Abulkhanovich	aged sixty-eight	145 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
4.	Akhmadov, Issa "Munya"	aged thirty-five	believed to be 162 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
5.	Akhmadova, Rakat	aged eighty-two	162 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
6.	Akhtaev, Lema	aged thirty-two	1 Fourth Tsimliansky Lane
7.	Akhmatov, Issa Shirvanovich	aged forty-one	1 Fourth Tsimliansky Lane
8.	Arsamirzoyev, Avalu Iliasovich	aged fifty-four	110 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
9.	Arsamirzoyev, Bilal/Suliman Iliasovich	aged forty-nine	110 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
10.	Azuev, Aindi Abdulmuslimovich	aged seventy-two	125 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
11.	Baigirayev, Shamkhan	aged about thirty-two	42 First Matasha-Mazaeva Lane
12.	Bishaev, Salman "Avkhan"	aged fifty-four	3 Kislovodskaya Street, Chernorechie
13.	Bishaev, Amkhad	aged twenty-eight	3 Kislovodskaya Street, Chernorechie
14.	Bisultanova, Koka Bai-Alievna	aged forty-two	127 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
15.	Dadaev, Ibragim Vakhaevich	aged forty-nine	82 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
16.	Dzhabrailov, Sultan Vakhaevich	aged fifty-three	39 Second Tsimliansky Lane
17.	Dzhambekov, Vakha Betirsultanovich	aged fifty-three	believed to be 23 Third Matasha-Mazaeva Lane
18.	Elmurzaev, Ramzan Daudovich	aged thirty-two	11 Khoperskaya Street

¹¹⁵ All addresses are in Aldi unless otherwise indicated.

No.	Name	Age	Address
19.	Estamirov, Khasmagomed	aged sixty-seven	1 Podolskaia Street
20.	Estamirov, Khozh-Akhmed	aged thirty-seven	1 Podolskaia Street
21.	Estamirova, Toita	aged twenty-nine	1 Podolskaia Street
22.	Estamirov, Khassan	aged one	1 Podolskaia Street
23.	Gadaeva, Aimani Magomedovna	aged forty-one	129 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
24.	Gaitaev, Magomed	aged seventy-two	140 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
25.	Ganaev, Alvi Vakhidovich	aged sixty	85 Brianskaia Street
26.	Ganaev, Aslanbek Alvievich	aged thirty-four	85 Brianskaia Street
27.	Ganaev, Sulumbek Alvievich	aged twenty-eight	85 Brianskaia Street
28.	Idigov, Lom-Ali	aged thirty-five	3 Irtyskskaia Street
29.	Khadzhimuradov, Alvi Germanovich	aged fifty-eight	119 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
30.	Khaidaev, Gula	aged seventy-six	162 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
31.	Khakimov, Vakha Abdukhalimovich	aged forty-seven	33 Second Almazny Lane
32.	Khaniev, Tuta	aged forty-six	106 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
33.	Khasbulatov, Magomed "Musa" Arbievich	aged forty-seven	60 Second Tsimliansky Lane
34.	Khirikhanov, Salman Akhmkhadzhievich	aged sixty-five	27 Donbasskaia Street, Chernorechie
35.	Kudozov, Umar Gelaevich	aged forty-eight	88 Tsimlianskaia Street
36.	Kudozov, Gana Gelaevich	aged fifty-eight	88 Tsimlianskaia Street
37.	Kurbanova, Zura	aged about thirty-eight	Brianskaia Street
38.	Kuznetsova, Elena	aged eighty	58 Second Tsimliansky Lane
39.	Magomadov, Abdulla Anorbekovich	aged fifty-four	160 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
40.	Magomadov, Salamu Anorbekovich	aged sixty	160 Matasha-Mazaeva Street

No.	Name	Age	Address
41.	Masarov, Said-Akhmed	aged fifty	1 Podolskaia Street
42.	Mezhidov, Ruslan	aged twenty-one	140 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
43.	Musaev, Abdurakhman	aged fifty-one	114 Voronezhskaia Street
44.	Musaev, Umar	aged seventy-one	112 Voronezhskaia Street
45.	Musaev, Suliman	aged thirty-five	114 Voronezhskaia Street
46.	Musaev, Yakub	aged fifty-one	114 Voronezhskaia Street
47.	Rasaev, Khavazh Baudinovich	aged forty-seven	112 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
48.	Shiptora, Victor Platonovich	aged forty	body found on Khoperskaia Street
49.	Sugaipov, Avalu Shuddievich	aged fifty-two	152 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
50.	Sulumov, Rustam Gelanievich	aged twenty-one	27 Donbasskaia Street, Chernorechie
51.	Sulumov, Zainali Gelanievich	aged forty-four	27 Donbasskaia Street, Chernorechie
52.	Surname unknown, Kaipa	aged fifty-one	body found 152 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
53.	Tasuev, Sultan Vakhaevich	aged fifty	14 Third Tsimliansky Lane
54.	Timirov, Sultan	aged fifty	170 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
55.	Umkhaev, Rizvan	aged seventy	183 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
56.	Unnamed male victim "A"	aged over forty-five	body found 152 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
57.	Unnamed male victim "B"	aged over forty-five	body found 152 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
58.	Vakhidov, Said "Doga"	aged forty-five	29 Khoperskaia Street
59.	Yakhiaev, Khampash Sultanovich	aged forty-two	52 Second Tsimliansky Lane
60.	Yakhiaev, Musa	aged forty-eight	believed to be 52 Second Tsimliansky Lane

LIST OF UNCONFIRMED KILLINGS ON FEBRUARY 5 IN ALDI

No.	Name	Age	Address, where known
1.	Apaeva, Luisa Azimovna	aged thirty-five	132 Second Tsimliansky Lane
2.	Aiskhanov, Ruslan Usupovich	aged twenty-two	79 Almaznaia Street
3.	Dzhamaldaev, Salamu Dikalbievich	aged about fifty	74 Almazanaia Street
4.	Ganaev, Musa	aged fifty-six	killed near 144 Almaznaia Street
5.	Ganaeva, Koka	age unknown	killed near 144 Almaznaia Street
6.	Isaeva, Tamara	aged thirty-five	75 Almaznaia Street
7.	Kachirov, Ruslan Tagirovich	aged twenty-six	11 Yeiniseiskaia Street
8.	Madalaev, Ruslan Vakhanovich	aged thirty	address unknown
9.	Magalov, Vakha	aged about sixty	address unknown
10.	Makhmudzhaev, Magomed	aged thirty	22 Second Dalny
11.	Misirbiev, Ali	aged thirty-two	address unknown
12.	Mirsibiev, Khussein	aged thirty-six	address unknown
13.	Musaev, Khamzat Abulaevich	aged forty-two	174 Voronezhskaia Street
14.	Musaeva, Elsa Vakhidovna	aged fifteen	address unknown
15.	Muskhanova, Aimani Abuyaznovna	aged thirty-six	136 Matasha-Mazaeva Street
16.	Musustov, Issa	aged twenty-seven	Almaznaia Street
17.	Mydalov, Khamzai Vakhaievich	aged about thirty- two	address unknown
18.	Satuev, Abdul-Rokhman	aged thirty two	killed on Second Tsimliansky Lane
19.	Vakhidov, Ramzan Salmanovich	aged thirty-two	187 Khoperskaia Street

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