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For immediate release

Strasbourg Court condemns Russia for four extrajudicial executions in Chechnya and 'astonishing ineffectiveness' in investigation

On 25 November 2010, in its ruling in the case of *Amuyeva & Others v Russia* (No. 17321/06), the European Court unanimously held that Russian servicemen illegally killed four Chechen civilians on 7 February 2000, in the village of Gekhi-Chu, in violation of Article 2 (right to life) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court awarded the four applicants (the victim's relatives) 60,000 EUR each in moral damages. The case was litigated by the European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC), based at London Metropolitan University, and the Russian NGO, Memorial HRC.

In early February 2000 the village of Gekhi-Chu in Chechnya was under the full control of the Russian military. However, on the evening of 6 February 2000, Russian forces opened fire on the village when a group of Chechen fighters arrived. On 7 February 2000, the village was shelled and bombed causing the victims, and other villagers, to take shelter in a basement.

At 2 p.m. that day the shelling stopped and soldiers ordered the people out of the basement. Four men were taken aside. One of the applicants, Abdul-Rakhim Israilov, saw the servicemen check the four men's passports and examine their torsos for evidence of whether they had been carrying weapons. Three of the men were his brothers and the fourth was another villager. The four men were then taken to another courtyard. 10-15 minutes later gunshots were heard from that direction. After the servicemen had left the village Abdul-Rahim went to the courtyard and found the bodies of the four men, all had gunshot wounds and two also had knife wounds to the back.

The European Court was satisfied that the four men were killed by State servicemen and in the "absence of any justification in respect of the use of lethal force by State agents" the killings had violated Article 2 ECHR. There was a second violation of Article 2 due to the inadequate investigation into the killings, which had many serious defects, the most obvious of which was:

"the absence of any action to identify and question the commanders and servicemen of the military units who had taken part in the security operation in Gekhi-Chu and, eventually, to bring charges against those responsible. [...] In the Court's view, the astonishing ineffectiveness of the prosecuting authorities in this case can only be qualified as acquiescence in the events."

Finally, the flawed investigation undermined the effectiveness of any other remedy that might have existed giving rise to a violation of Article 13 (right to an effective remedy).

EHRAC's Senior Lawyer, Joanna Evans said that:

"It appears that in the course of the investigation the supervising prosecutors and courts pointed out and criticised the investigation's failings, however they were ignored. It is now time for those failings to be addressed and for those responsible for these killings to be brought to justice."