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For immediate release

European Court to rule on Chechen landmine case

On 9 October 2008, the European Court of Human Rights will rule in a case concerning the death of Vakhazhi Albekov and Khasayn Minkailov and the serious injury of Nokha Uspanov in October 2000. They were blown up by landmines allegedly laid by Russian troops stationed near the village of Akhkinchu-Barzoy in Chechnya on land used by the villagers as pasturage. The applicants, who are relatives of the victims, are represented by the European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC), based at London Metropolitan University, and the Russian NGO, *Memorial*.

On the afternoon of 23 October 2000, Vakhazhi Albekov did not return from collecting the family's cattle from a field near the village. His relatives and neighbours organised a search for him. At about 2pm the following day Vakhazhi's disfigured body was found in a pit in the forest near the military unit. Footprints on the ground by the pit led to the military unit. The unit declined a request to provide sappers to check if the body had been mined and the villagers recovered the body themselves.

During the search Khasayn Minkailov was killed by a booby trap mine and another villager who was with him was seriously injured. Two more villagers, including Nokha Uspanov, lost limbs in landmine explosions while searching for Khasayn.

Despite assurances made to Vakhazhi's family by officials who came to Akhkinchu-Barzoy on 25 October 2000 that a criminal investigation would be conducted into the circumstances of the deaths, the victims' families alleged that they have been either denied access to the prosecutor responsible for the investigation or intimidated when they have made enquiries about its progress.

An application was lodged with the European Court on 10 December 2001. On 13 September 2007 it was declared admissible under Articles 2 (right to life) and 13 (effective remedy) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

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