



# **Chechnya/Ingushetia: A Deliberate Strategy of Non-Assistance to People in Crisis**

A Doctors Without Borders/  
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Report

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# *Introduction*

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Since the resumption of war in Chechnya in 1999, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has repeatedly denounced the conduct of Russian and pro-Russian forces toward Chechen civilians.<sup>1</sup> Testimonies gathered by MSF staff working in Chechnya and neighboring Ingushetia and Georgia have illustrated the arbitrary and violent nature of treatment meted out to civilians in Chechnya as a result of the “fight against terrorism” being waged by the Russian authorities. In particular, MSF has spoken out against indiscriminate bombings and attacks on Chechen civilians and civilian targets, acts or threats of violence against Chechen civilians, the displacement of civilians without adequate provisions for their care, and the obstacles to humanitarian assistance to the population of Chechnya.

Now in its third year, the war in Chechnya continues to exact a heavy toll on the civilian population. Today, it is harder than ever to deliver humanitarian aid inside Chechnya due to the deterioration in security conditions for aid workers and an increasingly obstructive bureaucracy. In fear for their lives, and without access to assistance in their home country, large numbers of civilians continue to flee Chechnya to neighboring Ingushetia where they are forced to live in inhumane conditions.

In the fall of 2001, MSF staff assisting displaced Chechens in Ingushetia listened to and recorded dozens of testimonies. In addition, MSF carried out a survey on the living conditions of displaced persons in Ingushetia. The conclusions in this report are based on the findings of these testimonies and the survey.

- Civilians in Chechnya live under a reign of terror, in a prison-like environment characterized by arbitrary rules and daily violence. In the last two years, there has been no independent international inquiry into the large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that are perpetrated on a daily basis in Chechnya.
- The war continues to cause large numbers of civilians to leave Chechnya and seek refuge in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and other neighboring republics. Since the beginning of the year 2001, these new arrivals are considered 'clandestine' and no longer officially registered. In Ingushetia, between 20,000 and 50,000 persons have not been officially recorded as displaced Chechens by EMERCOM (the Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters division of the Russian Federation Civil Defense Ministry) nor the Russian Ministry of Interior. In Dagestan, MSF teams have observed the same situation; there, between 10,000 and 12,000 persons have not yet been officially registered or assisted by the authorities. Without this registration, the displaced are unable to receive official relief assistance dispensed by the Russian, Ingush, or Dagestani authorities. Without a comprehensive registration system, it is also more difficult

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<sup>1</sup> See the MSF reports “The Tracking of Civilians: Interviews with Chechen Refugees in Georgia,” December 1999; “Chechen Refugees in Ingushetia: A Survey,” August 2000; and “The Politics of Terror,” November 2000.

for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide adequate assistance to the displaced.

- Once they arrive in Ingushetia, these displaced persons<sup>2</sup> are housed in squalid and inhumane conditions, a fact even recognized by the Russian authorities. The paucity of assistance offered, combined with threats against them, is intended to drive the Chechens back to Chechnya. MSF is concerned that the return of the displaced to Chechnya only take place on a voluntary basis and if the conditions in Chechnya permit it.

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<sup>2</sup> Legally, Chechens who have sought refuge in Ingushetia and other neighboring republics of the Russian Federation are not refugees but internally displaced persons (IDPs) because they have not crossed an international border. In reality, however, they were forced to leave their homes because of insecurity and therefore, like refugees, they are in need of protection and assistance in accordance with international humanitarian law and relevant conventions (especially the rule of "non-refoulement") and specific provisions of the Russian law covering forced migrants.

# ***Recommendations***

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## **MSF calls upon the Russian authorities to:**

- Fully respect international humanitarian law in the armed conflict in Chechnya. In particular, ensure the adequate protection of civilians remaining in Chechnya.
- Immediately reverse policies intended to pressure displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, Dagestan and other republics to unwillingly return to their homes in Chechnya despite ongoing warfare and insecure conditions there. In particular, resume registration of displaced Chechens and provide humanitarian assistance according to the real needs of the actual number of displaced people.

## **MSF urges all parties to the conflict in Chechnya to:**

- Respect access for humanitarian organizations to operate unhindered in Chechnya, Ingushetia, and other neighboring republics according to the Geneva Conventions, including the simplification of administrative regulations.

## **MSF urges the United Nations Security Council, especially key member states like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, to immediately hold Russia accountable for violations of international humanitarian law in the region by:**

- Taking appropriate measures to hold Russia responsible for respecting international humanitarian law both inside Chechnya and in neighboring republics, particularly by implementing policies assuring adequate protection and assistance of civilian Chechens.
- Raising the issue of the consequences of the war in Chechnya on the civilian population (especially repeated violations of fundamental rights under international humanitarian and human rights law and denied access to humanitarian assistance) with the relevant international bodies, particularly the United Nations Security Council, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights.
- Calling for an international independent inquiry on the war in Chechnya and its consequences on the Chechen civilian population.

**MSF calls upon United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UNICEF, and the World Food Program (WFP), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and the donor community to:**

- Immediately reinforce humanitarian programs for displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and other neighboring republics and significantly increase the level of assistance according to the needs of the actual number of displaced.

# *Conditions in Chechnya: An Open Air Prison*

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Testimonies gathered in the fall of 2001 from newly-arrived Chechens in Ingushetia show that innocent men and women continue to die every day inside Chechnya, either by direct acts of violence or because they were caught in crossfire. Some have simply ‘disappeared’ or been wounded in the course of cleansing campaigns (*zatchiskas*, also called sweep operations). The war, described as an ‘anti-terrorist operation’ by Moscow, continues to oppress a civilian population deprived of any rights, assistance, or recognition.

Gathered by MSF field workers in Ingushetia, the testimonies also show that simple day-to-day survival is becoming harder for civilians in Chechnya. Every excursion outside their homes is risky as residential areas continue to be the target of bombings and *zatchiskas*. As a result, many residents of Chechnya spend much of their time in cellars. The little property or personal belongings they may still have are subject to the predatory behavior of ill-paid or unpaid soldiers, who help themselves with total impunity.

## *Escaping war crimes and crimes against humanity*

The war in Chechnya has been raging for more than two years now. Since the end of the conquest phase and most intensive bombings, Russian forces have remained present in the territory, behaving like a particularly brutal and undisciplined occupying army. After the loss of Grozny, the Chechen fighters retreated to the mountains in the south, from which they launch guerrilla operations into the towns and cities, harassing the federal troops and the pro-Russian administration. The attack in broad daylight on the pro-Russian governor of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, in his Grozny office in September 2001 shows the degree of insecurity, even in areas controlled by Russian troops.

The violence of the conflict, the Russian repression, and the assimilation of civilians with the actions of the rebel groups make every civilian a potential victim. Men from 15 to 50 years of age—and sometimes younger—are the most threatened, and the random violence and risks to which they are exposed often oblige them to flee or join ranks with the soldiers. Far from improving, this situation has continued to deteriorate. Since September 2001, the resumption of bombing, rocket fire, and the danger of stray bullets have forced many Chechens to spend most of their time seeking safety in their cellars, like rats. In Chechnya, horror is a part of daily life.

Despite being planned for early 2001, the reduction of Russian troops on the ground in Chechnya has not yet taken place. The only actual change in this area has been a transfer of a part of the military responsibility to the FSB (the Russian Federal Security Service). Since this change, the massive violations of human rights and of humanitarian law have continued. Last July, the attacks against Sernovodsk – previously considered a secure location for displaced Chechens because of its proximity to the border – and Assinovskaya demonstrated extreme violence towards the Chechens, including the rape of men, disappearances, and torture, as reported in the international press. During the course of their work, MSF’s medical staff frequently hears stories of Chechen civilians suffering from systematic pillaging and daily acts of violence and humiliation. Through

the use of *zatchiskas*, arbitrary arrests, filtration camps, and systematic torture, the Russian authorities have turned Chechnya into an open-air prison, a ghetto ruled by random terror.

### ***Obstacles to the Presence of Relief Workers in Chechnya***

Last year, Russia officially and publicly invited aid organizations to assist with the reconstruction of Chechnya, presenting their request to MSF in March 2001. Since that time, however, the prevailing climate of insecurity coupled with the unreasonable pressures exerted on NGO independence by Resolution 22 has made access to Chechnya more and more difficult and hazardous.

Resolution 22 is the judicial framework imposed by the Russian and pro-Russian Chechen governments on international aid organizations in the spring of 2001. The decree unfairly impedes the work of humanitarian groups that were founded on principles of impartiality and neutrality. Moreover, it does not provide any guarantees for an independent evaluation of needs or verification of aid distribution and improperly aims to control and harshly sanction displaced peoples. In response, many NGOs and the United Nations accepted to sign a "Letter of Understanding" with the purpose of amending the Resolution, but the proposition has, until now, been ignored.

There have been regular and disturbing 'incidents' in which members of humanitarian organizations were injured or harassed, including a gun shot wound to a driver for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the search of People in Need Foundation (PINF) offices in Grozny, and the arrest and brutal interrogation of ICRC staff at a military blockade. Whether they originated with the Russian forces or with various Chechen groups, these serious security incidents are a constant danger to humanitarian organizations and aid workers.

Although the various leaders of independent groups in Chechnya have condemned the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in the United States, the alignment of Russia with the U.S.-led anti-terrorism campaign has provided blanket approval to any actions in Chechnya that can be construed as anti-terrorist measures, regardless of the terms of the Geneva Conventions. The prevailing climate has also opened a window for all sorts of irregularities aimed at foreigners in Chechnya. As a result, few international relief organizations can send expatriate workers to work inside Chechnya and those that do enter must submit to restrictions on their freedom of movement and circulation, including armed escorts.

MSF again calls for any judicial framework in Chechnya to respect the international humanitarian right to deliver aid during conflict situations and reiterates the position that combatants allow humanitarian organizations, in particular medical missions, to work without unfair restraints.



## **Testimonies of the Ongoing Violence in Chechnya**

- **Sultan, age 45 – Karabulak:**

*“We arrived three weeks ago from the Vedeno region. We didn’t come sooner because we didn’t have enough money for the trip and to settle ourselves here. But we couldn’t stay there any longer, especially with the children. In two weeks, my daughters (8 and 11) only went to school for one or two days. And the little one, she’s 2 ½, when she sees the trucks and the APCs [armored personnel carriers], she cries out, “The Russians are here; the Russians are here!” When she sees planes, it’s she who yells, “Get to the cellar, to the cellar!” ...Since the summer it’s gotten really unbearable. Any day, a bomb could fall on our house. One of my sons could disappear. We were already spending a lot of time in the cellar, but it got worse every day. The children were more and more terrified, traumatized...”*

*“I’m an ambulance driver for the Vedeno hospital’s emergency department. I kept working, but there’s no pay and the vehicles are falling apart. One of the two hospital buildings is nothing more than a pile of ruins. The other is still standing and the doctors are still working in spite of everything, without gas, with electricity blackouts that sometimes last two weeks... People don’t want to stay in the hospital. Women who’ve given birth go right back home for fear of bombings. The doctors do their best. They get a little bit of humanitarian aid, medicines, from time to time.”*

- **Khava, age 38 – Sleptovskaya**

*“Last week, I went back there to collect the children’s benefit payments. I went to my building to see my neighbor and friend. That’s the second building I lived in Grozny because the first one was totally destroyed. Half of this one is still standing. She greeted me and began to cry. She told me that two nights earlier, five masked men came to her place. They spoke Russian. They forced her to open the door, began beating her husband, took her jewelry and finally put a gun to his head so that she would tell them which apartments still had people living in them. She had to go with them, floor by floor, lie to her neighbors so they would open the door in the middle of the night, and then witness terrible violence each time someone opened up. They wanted money, jewelry, and valuables. In one apartment, the woman had nothing to give so they beat the man who was there, her cousin. She was crying and begging but they said, ‘You had better figure something out! Find money!’”*

*“This war is big business for the Russians. Why would they leave? It will never end. They’re making too much money here. Like, at the checkpoints, they collect 30, 50, or 100 rubles from every car. And you, with your work, what difference will that make? None, because no one believes us anyway.”*

- **Noura, age 45 – Sleptovskaya**

*“My son left on a Friday. On Saturday they brought him back. It was Saturday, September 15<sup>th</sup>. In the morning he was outside, tending the cows, and they started bombing. His back was seriously injured. Three others from the village were wounded on the same day – two women and one man. A*

*cousin brought him here; he spent three weeks in the hospital and they removed the pieces of shrapnel from his back [she shows a piece of metal the size of an egg]. He was getting better; he could speak again. Then he started refusing to eat; he felt bad all the time, and he died. His backbone was broken but I didn't think he would die. I thought he would be an invalid, but live."*

- **Aminat, age 23 – Logobaz, Nazran**

*She is six months pregnant: "I have been here for a week and I'm sick! There were terrible bombings on Argun on October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, so I came here. I couldn't stand it there anymore. My husband was taken in a cleansing operation seven months ago; he had no papers, and I haven't heard from him since. There was a column of armored personnel carriers. My husband and a friend were outside; they got scared and went into the nearest house. Then the Russians went into the house, smashed everything, and took everyone away. I stayed because I didn't want to abandon my mother-in-law, who refuses to leave. But it's getting worse and worse and I couldn't stay any more. Go home? Yes, when the Russian army, the FSB [Russian Federal Security Service] and the GRU [Russian Military Intelligence], etc., have all gone."*

- **Rosa, age 21 – Bart Camp, in Karabulak**

*Seven months pregnant, she has just arrived from the Chechen mountains: "I live in Dechny-Vedeno, a very tiny village in the mountains near Vedeno. On Monday [October 15<sup>th</sup>] the militia building [Chechen, pro-Russian] burned down; then on Tuesday, they bombed the village. I was afraid; I ran and I fell down. I was afraid for my baby so I went, by car with my father to see Zarieta [the obstetrician-gynecologist at the MSF clinic]. I had already come the month before. This time, Zarieta told me I had to be hospitalized because my baby's heartbeat was very weak. With the first child, I had a cesarean.*

*"I don't know how or where I am going to give birth. I don't want to go to the hospital in Vedeno; nobody dares to stay there because it's too dangerous with the bombings. I went to Grozny two weeks ago with my sister to see the doctor who delivered my first baby. I looked for her in Grozny but she's not there anymore, so I won't be going in for an operation as planned on December 5<sup>th</sup> at the central maternity. I'm going to talk it over with my family to decide where to go."*

**Question: How do you live in Chechnya?**

*"Most of the time in the cellar. There is no aid except a little flour and sugar from the Danes [Danish Relief Council, DRC] for the children. There are lots of soldiers in the village; they have settled in on the marketplace and they are shooting every day. People are afraid to go to the bazaar though it's the only way to exchange things or find a little money—the only way to survive. They speed by in their APCs and scare everyone. Then they come into houses in the evenings asking for food and drink. There are zatchiskas all the time: they come in APCs, blockade the village, and search all the houses one by one, taking the young men. The ones they take never come back."*

- **Chirvan, age 21 – Karabulak**

Chirvan is spending some time at the ‘home’ of his aunt Assiat, a little room put together in one of the large stables. Usually there are five people living here: Assiat, her husband, and their three children. At the moment, there are three more here—Chirvan, his mother Kamieta, and one of his sisters—making eight total. The latter three will be returning to Chechnya in a few days. Chirvan jokes, *“I remember a time when, after working, we would go to rest for a few days in the mountains or at the seaside. Now, this is our ‘spa’!”* A room a few meters square with plastic tacked to the ceiling, a concrete floor they poured themselves on the hard ground, a bunk over half the space where everyone sleeps side by side, and blankets that barely manage to cover the stone walls. We hear cattle mooing right by us; the corridor is filled with an odor of fresh milk and cow manure.

*“I live in the suburbs of Goudermes, a small village. About a month ago, there were still zatchiskas in the area so this time my mother cried so much and begged so hard that I agreed to leave for a while. A few days before, they had taken young people from the village; they even take children 13 or 14 years old. I didn’t want to leave. I’m innocent and I’m a free man; I never fought against the Russians, so why should I flee my home?”*

*“Goudermes is between a forest and a main road. Even when there are no rebel attacks (and the last so-called ‘attack followed by a major battle,’ as the Russian media say, I can tell you it was nothing; they just say it to destabilize the region and launch their cleansing campaigns), the Russians bomb the forest because they say the rebels are hiding there. It happens every day! The problem is that the bombs regularly fall on the village or on civilians in the countryside. Old people and children are terrified.”*

## ***Ingushetia: The “Invisible” Displaced Chechens***

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MSF is extremely aware and concerned about the inability of aid organizations to handle the needs of the tens of thousands of newly-arrived displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, many of whom are living in *kompaknikis*, or squats, with little or no assistance. These people have fled from the daily threat of life in Chechnya and are simply looking for the means to survive. The deplorable conditions for displaced Chechens in Ingushetia, their inability to get registered and receive assistance, and the threats and pressure on them to return to Chechnya may also deter people in need of safety and assistance from seeking refuge there.

### ***The Exodus from Chechnya Continues***

Although some predicted the displaced Chechens would start to return to Chechnya this past year, the reverse has actually been occurring. Chechen civilians continue to seek refuge in Ingushetia, fleeing the fighting and hoping to find the means for themselves and their families to survive. According to UNHCR estimates, between January 2001 and January 2002, 13,600 individuals crossed the border into Ingushetia, while only 5,650 returned to Chechnya. This migration started again with the *zatchiskas* in July 2001 in Sernovodsk and Assinovskaya and kept increasing, especially since bombing began again in the mountainous areas of Chechnya (Vedeno, Shali, Itum-Kale, and Argun) in mid-September.

For these newcomers, who number as many as 1,200 persons per week (according to the figures of the Ingush Migration Service), settling in Ingushetia is a tough proposition. Even ignoring the complex problem of registration (detailed below), the first challenge is to find a safe place for one's family. With a little money, it is possible to find a room with local inhabitants, but at a cost that runs between 1000 and 3000 rubles, or 35-100 US dollars per month. With some luck, others find space in half a tent sold by someone who has found better lodgings. In fact, some of the displaced persons returning to Chechnya sell their room or tent to new arrivals.

If the new arrivals have no money, they had better hope for luck through family connections in Ingushetia. Perhaps, after a while, they will be able to find space in a *kompaknik* or build their own dwelling in a recognized camp location. Often, however, there is nothing available. Many Chechens cross the border, stay with relatives for a short while, and then leave again because they cannot find anywhere to stay.

### ***No New Camps for the Displaced to Be Built***

Instructions have been handed down from the authorities to prevent the construction of any new camps for displaced Chechens (see Appendix I for an interview with officer in charge of the Ingush Migration Service). There are several factors at work: the Chechen government wants the displaced Chechens to return home in order to benefit from humanitarian aid subsidies; the Russian authorities want the displaced to return to Chechnya in order to demonstrate that the situation within the country is calm; and the Ingush authorities have begun to impose restrictions on any new housing projects for the displaced (for example, they don't want any additional tents or rooms built or established

in the Ingush cities of Malgobek, Nazran, or Sleptsovskaya) as they claim that the number of displaced persons has begun to create tensions.

***The “Invisible” Chechens in Ingushetia Increase as Registration is Suspended***

Registration of newly-arrived Chechens in Ingushetia has been officially suspended since February-March 2001. New arrivals are therefore effectively “invisible” as they do not appear on the official registration lists of Chechens living in Ingushetia. Women at MSF clinics also describe how the authorities refuse to register children born on Ingush territory.

The absence of official registration of displaced persons obviously makes the number of daily arrivals difficult to assess and seriously handicaps any humanitarian assistance program. Indeed, without a complete census of this displaced population, the existence of some 20,000 to 50,000 people is being ignored. Official registrations counted 150,000 displaced persons, while the passport and Propiskas services counted 170,000, and the Ingush authorities estimate they are hosting 200,000 displaced Chechens.

Without registration on these official lists, displaced Chechens in Ingushetia cannot claim any aid delivered by EMERCOM, which is primarily responsible for the general distribution of provisions. Although each non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Ingushetia, including MSF, has some of its own benefit recipient records, the fact remains that in the absence of a complete census, the NGOs have to plan their assistance programs on the basis of incomplete lists.

## Testimonies on the “Invisible” New Chechen Exiles in Ingushetia

- **Officer in charge of the Migration Service for the Republic of Ingushetia**

*“The official number of displaced persons is 150,000, but registrations were halted six months ago and there are clearly more of them now. Registrations were suspended because the Chechen government told us it had the means and the resources to take charge of the displaced persons. They believe the displaced persons are going to come back and they say they will improve their living conditions there.”*

Question: What are the tangible consequences for those who are not registered?

Answer: *“They can receive humanitarian aid from the NGOs but not from the government, meaning the bread every other day and 15 rubles a day that are distributed by our services.”*

- **Natasha, age 43 – Sleptsovskaya**

Her husband died from an illness last April. She has five adolescent children to feed, three sons ages 16, 18, and 19, and two daughters ages 12 and 15. Previously poor, the family is now completely destitute and must rely entirely on help from neighbors, the camp director, and others nearby. Currently staying in a tent at the Rassvet camp in Sleptsovskaya, Natasha fears she could become homeless at any moment.

*“I don’t even have a bed for my two daughters. Since we arrived from Alkhan Kala in September, I have been everywhere—to Alina, Sputnik, Satsita—but there you have to pay for an empty tent. Here, I go begging from tent to tent. One man who went back to Chechnya for a while lent me half his tent, just until I find a place. I’m not registered anywhere. I don’t know what you’re supposed to do. I’m lost. I don’t know how we’re going to manage to live here.”*

- **Sultan, age 45 – Karabulak**

Newly-arrived from Chechnya, Sultan and his family are destitute, even if lucky to have found this place to live. They must borrow flour from neighbors. They will return the flour if and when they get their first food aid allocation. A neighbor who arrived before them explains: *“People have to wait at the Danish Relief Council [DRC] and ICRC offices for two or three months before they decide to put the new arrivals on their lists. And meanwhile, how are people supposed to live?”*

*“We’re not registered on any lists so for now we’re not getting any help. It’s very difficult because our money is already gone. The Migration Service took our names. The people who lived here before got bread from EMERCOM. We tried to explain and take their place on the list but EMERCOM refused. Today my two sons and I went to the fields to gather potatoes.”*

*“We’ve had some strange experiences. In Dechny-Vedeno, we received aid from the DRC. When I got to Ingushetia, I went to explain our situation to the DRC office so they would take our names off the lists in Chechnya and add us to the lists here. They did take our names off the first list. As for the second step, we’re*

*still waiting. Luckily, the neighbors help us as best they can. Yesterday, someone gave us some rice.”*

- **Khouzimat, age 101 – Sleptsovskaya**

She lives in the corner of a barn at Bogatyr. Her tiny room is windowless. The walls and floor are covered with threadbare carpets. There are two metal beds because she is afraid to sleep alone. Plastic and cardboard cover the ceiling. She has no dishes or stove—only a little electric heater.

*“I usually get help from the Danes [the DRC], but they’ve already taken me off their list three times. I haven’t gotten anything for three months. Fortunately, the neighbors bring me a dish of food at night. And I bake bread outside.*

# *Ingushetia: A Strategy of Minimal Assistance to the Displaced*

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According to official EMERCOM sources, about 200,000 Chechens have fled to Ingushetia, Georgia, and Dagestan since the resumption of warfare in Chechnya in 1999, but this figure can no longer be considered accurate. Although official registration of displaced Chechens ended in the spring of 2001, the flood of Chechens seeking refuge in Ingushetia from the ongoing violence in Chechnya has continued. Official figures, therefore, fail to count new arrivals and newborns.

In the course of their daily relief work in Ingushetia, MSF staff has observed appalling conditions in which the vast majority of displaced Chechens are forced to live. The closing of registration lists, the “invisibility” of newly arrived displaced, and their inability to qualify for official relief assistance, combined with a moratorium on the construction of any new housing projects or tent campsites for displaced Chechens, amounts to a strategy of deliberate denial of assistance on the part of the Russian and Ingush authorities. As most displaced Chechens in Ingushetia remain reluctant to return to the violence in Chechnya from which they fled, the options for seeking safe haven in Ingushetia are growing increasingly small.

## ***Living Conditions Increasingly Inadequate***

Unsanitary cellars with no light or ventilation. Windowless tiny farmhouses with several families squeezed in together. Excessive rents demanded by private individuals. Leaky tents. These are the conditions many displaced Chechens face in Ingushetia. As they prepare to spend a third winter in Ingushetia, many of the displaced are being forced to live in deplorable, humiliating conditions that may have damaging consequences to their health and well-being.

Those Chechens who still have some money can rent rooms in private homes in Ingushetia, but those without money or family in Ingushetia must live in tent camps, and the least fortunate are reduced to squatting in public buildings.

The ‘squats,’ or *kompaknikis*, are invisible dumps where people are forced to live in the most squalid of conditions. The *kompaknikis* can be all kinds of places: abandoned or working factories, active or deserted state farms, warehouses, vacant schools, cellars, stables, etc. More than 40,000 Chechens are believed to be living in *kompaknikis* in Ingushetia. However, there are no official figures available and assessment of these sites is neither official nor exhaustive. It is in these many *kompaknikis* that conditions are the hardest. Many are infested with rats and cockroaches and lack heating, ventilation, water, and sanitation facilities. Despite being unfit for human habitation, many of these locations house up to 1,000 people each. Many of the residents of such *kompaknikis*, even those that are regularly inspected by NGOs active in Ingushetia, have not received any help with their vital water and sanitation needs or with protection from cold and rain.

For the past year, MSF has been responding to the needs of Chechens dwelling in *kompaknikis* by moving families out of unsanitary dwellings (e.g. cellars), constructing small shelters to lodge families, providing insulation materials to families that have built



their own shelters, and providing decent sanitary installations (i.e. the construction of latrines and showers, the installation of water distribution points, etc.). But this work is far from complete: just one month ago MSF found a new location where seven families were living in cellars.

According to a study of the displaced population conducted by MSF, 55% of the displaced lived with leaking roofs and holes in the walls. Given the severity of winter conditions in Ingushetia, MSF believes that such conditions constitute a public health emergency, endangering the life and health of the displaced.

In the tent camps in Ingushetia, where approximately 30,000 displaced Chechens live, the tents are worn out and there is serious overcrowding. Most of the tents do not adequately protect people from the cold and rain. In addition, most tents are overcrowded. Military tents designed to house 20 people are sometimes being used to shelter two or even three times that number. Sanitary conditions are deplorable: there are not enough latrines, many of the existing ones are full and therefore useless, there are problems with access to potable water, and there is overpopulation.

An MSF survey of 440 heads-of-family at 70 different sites<sup>3</sup> for displaced Chechens in Ingushetia (carried out in the fall of 2001) found that more than 80% of the tents were punctured or torn, letting in the rain, snow, and cold. The same survey revealed that displaced people living in collective sites – camps or *kompaknikis* – had their crucial shelter problems compounded by lack of access to decent sanitary facilities: more than 80% shared a latrine with more than 20 people, and of those, 20% shared a latrine with over 100 people. In some locations, there was less than one latrine for 200 people. As for showers, more than half the displaced living in collective centers shared a shower with more than 200 people. In addition, over half of the displaced were living in less than 3 square meters per person. The international standard for refugees and prisoners stipulates an allowance of at least 3.5 to 4.5 square meters per person.

### ***Private Sector Shelter Growing Expensive and Scarce***

Between 80,000 and 100,000 Chechens in Ingushetia have rented rooms, often at high prices, from local people, or are staying at friends' or families' homes.<sup>4</sup> These people are generally considered better off than the rest as long as they can pay rent or the goodwill of their hosts doesn't run out. The MSF survey carried out this past fall showed that more than half the displaced housed in the private sector have moved at least once since their arrival because they were unable to pay the rent. At that point, they often become homeless and are reduced to seeking room in *kompaknikis*. This trend, including some cases of outright eviction, is accelerating with the arrival of winter and the need for Ingushetian landlords to pay gas and electricity bills.

### ***Assistance Withheld as Part of Deliberate Strategy of Coercion***

Last November 19th, the Russian President's Representative for Human Rights in Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamanov, joined other European deputies in deploring the living conditions of displaced Chechens, saying that the situation was "reaching a critical stage." (Source: Itar-Tass agency) The inadequate level of 'assistance,' according to Kalamanov, is the result of an administrative game of tag. However, the Federal Ministry

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<sup>3</sup> See results of the survey in Appendix II.

<sup>4</sup> 42% of Chechens in private accommodation are taken in by families or friends and 58% rent from the inhabitants.

which had previously taken charge of the displaced Chechens had been closed down, and responsibility for them had been given to the Interior Ministry, which ‘needed time’ to assume caring for them. MSF remains skeptical that simple bureaucratic and organizational problems are the real cause of the delay in providing assistance to the displaced Chechens.

From March 2001, the Russian and pro-Russian authorities and major UN agencies asserted that most of the displaced would return home during the summer of 2001. For example, EMERCOM began work on restoring homes in Chechnya. At the same time, these same agencies stopped most of their activities in Ingushetia, continuing only their food distributions—and even the food distributions became erratic. Without warning, EMERCOM suspended the distribution of hot meals, replacing them with rations that have not been evaluated for quantity or quality according to international standards (which stipulate that the daily minimum ration should be 2100 calories per person). Canned meat is distributed a year beyond its expiration date. Non-food items that are indispensable for survival, like blankets, mattresses, cooking utensils, and heating systems, have not been distributed to everyone. In the absence of any aid coordination, those distributions which do take place are patchy and as a result do not help the most needy.

The UNHCR now recognizes that there are more Chechens arriving than departing, and that we must prepare for another winter in Ingushetia. According to Peter Mantz, UNHCR’s officer in charge of shelter, “Very few displaced persons are returning to Chechnya. For example, last week there were 150 who returned, but 250 more arrived in Ingushetia. This summer, we were willing to provide return packages with a tent and everything needed, but very few were distributed.”<sup>5</sup> But the UNHCR still has not replaced the most damaged tents (a total of 670) in the six camps<sup>6</sup>, or provided new tents (about 400 are called for). Meanwhile, the planned construction of small houses in some “spontaneous settlements” has still not happened.

### ***A Population Under Pressure to Go Home***

During 2001, the Russian authorities increased the direct pressure on the displaced Chechens in Ingushetia to go home by publishing false reports about the amounts of aid offered in Chechnya. Throughout the spring and summer of 2001, representatives of the Internally Displaced Persons Committee of the Chechen Government came to the camps and the *kompaknikis* to incite the displaced to return to Chechnya. Their promises varied, according to different accounts: a place in a shelter, construction materials, a tent, food, money (2000 rubles total, 50 rubles a day, etc.), compensation for destroyed homes, etc.

Pressure was placed on the displaced Chechens to return: in Bart Camp, Taïssa, 32 years old, recounts that men came in the spring of 2001 to tell them to return as fast as possible before they were “kicked out with their tents and sent back to Chechnya.” In Nassir-Kort, Luiza, 34 years old, told of local administration representatives who came and threatened to cut off the gas and electricity if they didn’t leave.

Some of the buildings restored to house those who do return are located in the Chechen town of Argun, the scene of very heavy fighting over recent months. According to

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<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted in November 2001

<sup>6</sup> The six camps are: Aki Yurt, Bart, Sputnik, Rassvet, RMO, SMU, and Logovaz.

witnesses, most of the families who returned to Argun came back to Ingushetia within a few months.

The Russian government wishes to repatriate the displaced Chechens, but a number of factors including the resumption of large-scale fighting, the continued *zatchiskas* (cleansing campaigns), and the onset of winter, all render this impossible at the current time. Chechens questioned by MSF staff stated that their most significant worry about returning home was the safety of their family members, as violence is felt to be indiscriminate. The other main concern was that they would not be able to get the most basic things they needed to survive. When asked if they would like to return to Chechnya, all of the displaced questioned (about 80) gave versions of these two answers: “Yes, we would really like to return, but it is impossible for now,” or “No, it is impossible to live in Chechnya now because it isn’t safe.”

## **Testimonies on Conditions of Displaced Chechens in Ingushetia**

- **Khouda, in charge of the Logovaz camp: For lack of space, we sleep by turns**

Well hidden in the center of the Ingush capital, Nazran, the Logovaz camp is set up on the site of a market. Sixteen army tents have been erected in an empty area, surrounded by about 200 small huts. Living here are 1,870 people, along with an indeterminate number of rats, cockroaches, mice, cats, and dogs. Khouda takes us into a tent measuring 7 x 8 meters. Five families—a total of 45 people, of whom 13 are children—occupy half the space. One of the five families has two disabled children. Only 50 centimeters separates the space between the platform beds and the cooking area. The children burn themselves frequently.

For all intents and purposes, this is a dormitory. The residents must take turns sleeping. At night, the men sit in a corner and wait, smoking. During the day, when the children are at school and the women at the market, they can sleep for a few hours. The tent is falling apart. Its occupants have done what they can to repair the torn sections with cardboard or blankets. But despite their efforts, water seeps in when it rains. It is damp and cold. Cats and dogs enter, though not by the door. Huge cockroaches can be seen everywhere. Outside, whistling sounds come from the gas pipes that lay on the bare ground.

*“All we’re asking for are some extra tents or materials to build little sheds, like you’ve done at Tanzila Kafe. We just want to ease the frightful crowding in these places. In the last two years, the children have gotten bigger and there are new babies. We’ve got to get rid of the ruined tents. They’re falling apart, so the cats and dogs come and go as they please! The UNHCR said they were going to replace half of them but at the last meeting, they said, ‘Fix them yourselves.’ In the summer, people turn up the bottoms of the tents to dry them out. But now it’s raining and cold. When it rains, it’s a swamp in here. We’ve got to spread gravel everywhere.”*

- **Alek, age 37 – Bogatyr: Not even one blanket per person**

*“How do we live here? The jackets hanging on the wall—those are our pillows. We don’t have sheets; we don’t even have a blanket for each person. Some neighbors lent us the two mattresses for our girls. Zargan and I sleep right on the wood. I bought one of the beds for 50 rubles in one of the camps and fixed it up. People here gave us two more beds. We don’t have any sheets. The people here gave us all the dishes we have. I traded one of the stoves that EMERCOM handed out for this gas cooker, which is in lousy shape. You can’t use a stove here because there’s no vent and no window.*

*“It’s very damp here. When it rains outside, the walls are wet inside. There are roaches and rats everywhere. The little one has asthma and it’s getting worse. Her eyes are always red and watery. She gets every allergy. My wife has blood pressure problems. We’ve already had to call the emergency medical services twice. When the medics got here, they said it wasn’t surprising that her blood pressure would be bad. As for me, my tuberculosis is being treated—more or less.”*

- **Louisa, age 39 – Altievo: the roof leaks**

This is another farm converted, in a manner of speaking, into living space for displaced Chechens: three long earthen buildings, roofs in need of repair, rickety rooms built along the sides, walls made of cardboard, blankets, plywood and plastic. There is no privacy here, either. The noise - a neighbor's radio, the children's cries, a television turned up somewhere - reverberates from one end of the building to another.

*"This is our third winter here. There was nothing when we arrived. We did everything ourselves. But the roof still leaks. The toilets are disgusting, completely full. They've been that way since we got here and there are only seven for the entire camp. The humanitarian aid organizations parade through, one after the other, make promises, and never come back. Before, EMERCOM brought us hot meals but that ended in the spring. We get food from DRC and the ICRC handed out buckets and stoves, but we don't have enough blankets and mattresses."*

- **Lida, age 57 – Bella Camp in Sleptovskaya**

*"They have promised mountains of gold! A house, food, materials—everything we could hope for! But those are only words."*

- **Zelimkhan, age 15 - Bart Camp in Karabulak**

Zelimkhan was among the few families that returned in June to Argun, where a shelter for returnees had been prepared. He came back to Ingushetia in September.

*"Yes, they had promised to help us and in four months we got nothing, no money or materials to rebuild our house, just a little food three times a month."*

**Interview with Officer in Charge of Migration Services  
for the Republic of Ingushetia**

**Interview carried out by MSF staff member, November 2001**

*Question: What are the major problems facing the displaced Chechens in Ingushetia?*

A: The first problem is living space. There are around 30,000 people in the camps, more than 30,000 in the "*kompaknikis*" and from 80,000 to 90,000 in the private sector. Today, after two years, homeowners are evicting the displaced persons from their homes because it is hard for them too. Unfortunately, we are not going to build new tent camps. As agreed with the HCR, we will only build a few more spaces in some of the *kompaknikis*—for one or two thousand people.

*Q: Why can't new camps be built now?*

A: It's a political and financial matter. If it were to accept such a project, the federal government would be showing its weakness and inability to improve living conditions in Chechnya. And nobody can build a new camp quickly; it took the United Nations four months to build their two camps.

The second problem is preparing for winter. Half of the tents are in very bad condition and they urgently need to be replaced. The third problem concerns the Ministry of Health: there is a lack of doctors and medicine. Food supplies are more or less adequate, thanks to the NGOs, even if it is always the same thing. But people manage to exchange it at the market.

*Q: Some homeowners are evicting their refugee tenants. Why?*

A: The Ingushetians don't receive anything. There was a Swiss organization that gave each host family 100 dollars and the DRC also gave something. The main problem is the increasing water, gas, and electricity bills, which are not covered by the rent. The Republic buys all of these things from Russia and if the bills aren't paid, everything will be shut off. There has been a lot of discussion about this, but no results.

## **Interview with the Representative of the Internally Displaced Persons Committee of the Chechen Government**

*“The return of the displaced is a priority for the Chechen government. Buildings that were not too damaged have been restored in Grozny, Goudermes, Urus-Martan, Achkhoy-Martan and Argun. In Argun, three places are already finished: two kindergartens for 355 people and a shelter for 500. There are already 474 who have moved in. We are also setting up tent camps – two in Znamenskoye – and we are restoring the kompaknikis in Sernovodsk et Assinovskaya.”*

*“The Committee has a special department ‘for the return and resettlement of displaced Chechens.’ There are five people who share the administrative regions, meeting with people and explaining the situation and the options available to them. Depending on what people want, they are added to the list of return candidates and asked to write a letter requesting return. We already have 4000 volunteers and 1800 of these wish to return to Grozny. Most of the people living in the camps, like Alina, Bella, Bart, etc., do not want to spend another winter there, out in the cold wind. Once a week, a convoy leaves for Argun with a military escort. There have already been twelve of these in three months.”*

Question: According to what the displaced say, there is still a slight security problem...

Answer: *Indeed, I don’t claim to be able to guarantee security in Chechnya. I can’t even be sure of my own safety.*

Q: How can you help people return when you know that it’s dangerous?

A: *Four hundred thousand school children have returned to school in the last few days. People live their lives in Chechnya, and here people are fed up with staying in tents. They are ready; they want to go back. We are not forcing anyone.*

Q: Just the same, isn’t it dangerous to return people under these conditions?

A: *The whole Chechen people must return home. We have to resolve our own problems.*

Q: Wouldn’t it be better to wait until the war is over?

A: *When do you think that will be? I think it will happen when people return home, when the NGOs are working in Chechnya, when foreigners will be able to see and testify to what is going on here.”*

## *Conclusion*

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Is there a double standard? As it enters its third year, the conflict in Chechnya has yet to be described as what it is: an extremely brutal war with devastating consequences for civilians. The international indignation that ought to be aroused by this war being waged against the Chechen civilians in the name of an anti-terrorist campaign seems to have disappeared in the face of more pressing international political interests.

Despite the inhumane living conditions in Ingushetia, seeking refuge there has been a matter of survival for many of the displaced. They have chosen to take the risk of being forced to live like rats in cellars, in the cold, or even of finding no shelter or assistance because they do not feel able to stay in Chechnya in the current climate.

Clearly, the strategy of providing no assistance to these displaced Chechens in the hope that this will force them to go home has failed. Maintaining these displaced persons in such deplorable, inhumane, and humiliating conditions has not halted the exodus. It also will not propel these exiles to return to the prison-like, dangerous conditions, unpredictable violence and looting that reign in Chechnya today.

The reality of this exodus and the true number of displaced present in Ingushetia must be acknowledged so that sufficient quantities of decent aid may be provided to them.



# *Appendices*

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- I. Testimonies Recorded by MSF Staff in Ingushetia*
- II. Main Results of the MSF Survey on Living Conditions of Displaced Chechens Living in Ingushetia*
- III. MSF Programs in Chechnya and Ingushetia*

## Appendix I: Testimonies

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*These testimonies were gathered by MSF field staff during the course of their humanitarian relief activities in Ingushetia between October and November of 2001. The objective of gathering these accounts was to understand the history of the displaced persons and the difficulties they were encountering in order to better adapt MSF operations to their needs. Several of the testimonies have been excerpted in the body of this report.*

### **Lisa, age 32 - Nassir-Kort – Statement taken on October 17, 2001**

Lisa lives with her children, ages 12, 9, and 3, and her husband on a collective farm in Nassir-Kort, where the displaced have gradually built little rooms, of cardboard and blankets at first, then later of solid partitions. It is cold and dark inside the building. The floor is packed earth, and light bulbs every 20 meters barely light the area. Inside the individual rooms, the displaced have recreated Chechen interiors, with a few rugs, a tea set, etc. Her husband built the kitchen, which also serves as a collective kitchen and dormitory, when needed.

*“I arrived in Ingushetia with my husband and four children in late October of 1999. The border was closed and we had to wait for six days to cross. We lived for 18 months in an apartment with my brother-in-law’s family, paying rent. After the 18 months, we couldn’t pay anymore, so we came here to this collective farm where other displaced Chechens were already living. It was horrible; there was trash everywhere, no lights, animals living side-by-side with the people... But we “bought” a room anyway, for 1000 rubles, from displaced Chechens who were returning to Chechnya. Then, along with the children, we went to find bricks, cleaned them, and built another room for ourselves, then another. This kitchen is a sort of storeroom. Now, you might say that we are the richest ones here, with three rooms for six people, but there are always people here with us – family and new arrivals who have nowhere to go. Every night, there are people sleeping here, in the kitchen. I brought three mattresses from home and I had to split all of them in two.*

*“I come from the Grozny administrative region, near Khankala. My house was completely destroyed. My brother was a soldier and he was killed. My brother-in-law is dead too, killed by the Russians when he went out to get bread. That was in February of 1995. My parents-in-law have disappeared since then and my husband is still searching for them. He’s had heart problems since then. We are all sick. My twelve-year-old son has a urinary infection; my nine-year-old daughter has intestinal problems. I have problems with my spine. At first I worked, cleaning houses, to pay for their health care, but now I can’t; I’m in too much pain.*

*“Go home? I would love to go back to Chechnya. But there are still zatchiskas, all the time, everywhere. Every day, people who haven’t done anything disappear. And besides, we have no house anymore. If we had to, we could do something about that, but when I see the people arriving from Chechnya, like those who recently came from Tsotsi Yurt... For four days, there was a cleansing operation, they took all they could and broke the rest and on the walls of the houses they wrote obscenities about the Chechens. Yes, I have heard about the things they are offering us to return – money, building materials for houses, etc.— but as long as there are Russian soldiers in Chechnya, I will not go back. I live for my children; I don’t want to put them in danger. I am willing to go anywhere, I have two aunts in Belgium and I would like to go join them.*

*“Here, we feel like everyone has forgotten us. But we have had gas for the last month, thanks to you! They cut off the electricity for four days recently and that was very hard. Then the Red Cross [ICRC] came to distribute wood stoves so we could have heat, but when they saw our stove, they wouldn’t give us one. This stove isn’t ours and we have to return it soon, but they wouldn’t listen to us.”*

**Maiarbek, age 68 - Nassir-Kort – Statement taken on October 17, 2001**

His wife Natasha, 52, is a friend of Lisa (see above) and she also wanted to speak with us. She went to get her husband Maiarbek and her son Alibek, 31. The interview took place in Lisa's kitchen, where Maiarbek's family lived for a few weeks this fall. Maiarbek did the talking. When he cried, he lowered his head so that his hat would cover his eyes. He brought a plastic bag filled with manuscripts and old photos from the '20s, '30s, and '40s.

*"I lived in Grozny, in the most prominent house in the city. My father was a writer and a doctor, and the Minister of Education in the '30s—a great man. All his life, he wrote and kept documents on politics, culture, Chechen history, Caucasian literature, and so on. He spent his life defending Chechen culture. He died in 1979, so he fortunately did not see any of the things of these recent years.*

*"During the first war, our house was destroyed. I moved in with my brother, not far away, with the 30 cases of my father's archives. Then we had to leave Grozny and I hid the cases in a cellar, under some garbage. We went to Urus-Martan. At the end of the war, we found almost everything; just a few cases had disappeared. We lived with my brother and I began to put these papers in order—until 1999.*

*"When the second war started, I wanted to move the cases to Nazran. I was afraid and I didn't want to risk losing them again. We came here and rented a room but it was too expensive and we couldn't pay for long. I'm a pensioner and I receive 1200 rubles each month, but at the beginning of the war, I couldn't go back to Grozny to collect my pension. Then we found a house in the Malgobek district, but that was not for long either.*

*"Last May, we came here to Nassir-Kort, where a cousin had built a little room for himself and his family—six of them altogether. We felt very ashamed to burden them like that. When the cousin's daughter arrived with her children, we had to leave. We lived in this kitchen for a month [at Lisa's] but since there are always people coming and going, we had to leave here too. For the moment we are in another small room, an animal stall, but the family that lives there is beginning to let us know we should leave.*

*"We're not even thinking about food; all we want is a room to live in—a roof to protect the cases and ourselves. I saw one room burn down in two minutes because of a short circuit... I am very worried about the archives. They are a priceless treasure.*

*"My father had the soul of a great writer and historian. He wrote books about Chechen revolutionary heroes, about dissidents and about the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, but he also wrote poetry, tales for children and adults, and theater plays. Look at these photos. He wrote to people and they sent him pictures; he had them copied and sent them back. There are treasures here that should be published.*

*"Go home? I go back to Grozny each month to collect my pension; I know it is impossible to live there right now. The city is empty. Sometimes people run. There are dangers everywhere. As long as there are no guarantees of safety, we won't go back. I have two sons who are old enough to be arrested, even though they aren't soldiers.*

*"I never, never thought I would see such a thing at the end of my lifetime. I never believed that I would make my family live in a barn, with animals. My father was the first to translate the Chechen alphabet into Latin; he was the equivalent of Minister of Education in the '30s. He opened schools, created institutes. Now, nobody cares about any of that."*

**Bella and Mogamed, ages 21 and 31 – Plievo – Statement taken on October 17, 2001**

In Plievo, near Karabulak, there is a vast electric power plant that has never been completed. There are warehouses, buildings without roofs or windows, and another building nearly completed, the whole giving a striking impression of industrial decline. Last spring, MSF discovered fourteen families living in this place, in the basement of the finished building, and the upper floors were already packed with displaced Chechens. The cellars are unsanitary; a child had just died here, probably of pneumonia. MSF took emergency measures to enclose a building and install small rooms for these families. Then they continued, rehabilitating another building where 28 families were able to settle.

Bella and Mogamed have lived in 'Plievo II' since September 2001 with their two children, Idriss, age 2, and Iman, 5 months old. They smile all the time; the infant plays and laughs. They seem relieved and glad to be here. Mogamed speaks, while Bella approves or corrects him.

*"We'd been living in Urus-Martan since the end of the first war, but we lived in Grozny before. Since our home had been destroyed, we stayed in Urus-Martan, with my mother, where we had taken refuge during the war. When the second war began everyone left with the first bombardments, so we left too, for Ingushetia. That was in October 1999. First, we lived with a neighbor from Chechnya in an unfinished house together with livestock. Then with a relative, where we were paying 1000 rubles a month. At first he had asked for 100 dollars a month, but we talked him into lowering the price. We stayed there for eight months. Then my mother and my two brothers went back to Urus-Martan, but they urged us to stay in Ingushetia because of the baby and because Bella was pregnant. We found another room in Plievo for 300 rubles. But the owner's daughter got married and they asked us to leave. That was last September. We heard about this place from a Chechen neighbor who had been living in the cellars and had gotten out to move into one of the new rooms. We went to see the head of the camp, explained our situation, and she let us move in here. It's nice here—it's clean and we are sheltered—but we have no gas, just electricity, and that gets weak in the evening when everyone is trying to get warm with the little heating elements. We don't have a wood stove either. It's okay for now, but what will happen when it gets cold?"*

*"Go home? For the time being, it's out of the question. The situation is too dangerous, too unstable, especially in the Urus-Martan area, which is known to be a 'nest' of Wahabites. We heard that people are coming from Chechnya to push people to move back by promising money and space in shelters, but we've also heard that the people who went back have never received any money and that most of them have already returned here.*

*"Nevertheless, my mother and two brothers and sister live there, in Gichi (three-quarters of a kilometer from Urus-Martan). She doesn't want to leave and abandon the farm and the livestock. She tells us about the zatchiskas, the shooting at night, the planes and helicopters... We wouldn't be able to live there because of our papers for Grozny – there would be too many problems during inspections. Last week again, soldiers conducted a zatchiska in our village, targeting one house: they took three men, two of whom were young brothers under 18 years old. Their bodies were found a few days ago behind the village. And those who dare to go out and speak to the soldiers at the checkpoints are shot at night by the rebels. We are caught between the two, like in the days of the Whites and Reds<sup>7</sup>."*

### **Adlan, age 29 – Plievo – Statement taken on October 17, 2001**

Adlan is temporarily living in a room across from his brother, from which the inhabitants have gone to Chechnya for a few days to visit relatives. He cannot stay with his brother and his wife because that would not be proper. He has not found any lodgings or a 'real' place in a lodging: it's difficult for single young men if they are not with their parents.

*"I arrived from Argun last month, on September 8 to be precise, with my brother and sister-in-law. It really isn't possible to live back there anymore. There are zatchiskas every day, the FSB, the GRU, the army, every day. They arrive early in the morning, come into each house, take the men, and take them to filtration camps. In every city and every village it happens three, four, or five times a month. I was taken twice. They beat you and ask you 'Do you want to live? Then you have to pay!' There are no limits. And nobody cares—not the government in Chechnya or Russia, not the prosecutor's office, not the newspapers – nobody cares.*

*"When we arrived in Nazran, we went round and round in circles looking for a place to sleep. Then, by pure chance, we met a woman that we knew and she told us about this place, told us that the head of the camp was nice and would take us because of the baby (his brother's child). Everyone has helped us here, given us food to eat, loaned us blankets, an electric stove, etc.*

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<sup>7</sup> An allusion to the civil war of 1918-1920: villages were pillaged one day by the Reds, or Bolshevik army, and the next day by the Whites, the counter-revolutionary army.

*"We don't receive any assistance. We aren't registered; maybe the DRC will register us soon. For now, we depend on the other displaced Chechens.*

*"I don't know what I am going to do or where I am going to live. Maybe I should go back. I would really like to be back home, but for the moment, if you care about survival, it's impossible. The situation is getting worse every day. Other people are arriving; nobody is going back to Chechnya. Even those who went back to the shelters in Argun this summer, most of them have returned here again. It's impossible to live there and those who are saying otherwise are lying. Don't believe what they say on TV. In Argun, there are only women left; men have become very rare.*

*"Once, they took 118 young men in Argun for no reason. They weren't boivikis; some of them were just children! And they beat them mercilessly. Now, people say 'Might as well fight rather than die like that,' and they take up arms to die with dignity.*

*"The worst part is that the Russians don't want to fight with the boivikis because they're afraid! Only when they run out of money... They do a little zatchiska to get some, so they can buy their vodka.*

*"We are alive, we're not complaining."*

### **Rosa, age 21 – Karabulak – Statement taken October 18, 2001**

Rosa is on her way out of the MSF prenatal clinic at the Bart camp in Karabulak. Seven months pregnant, she arrived a few days earlier from the Chechen mountains. She seems unable to smile.

*"I live in Dechny-Vedeno, a tiny village in the mountains near Vedeno. On Monday, October 15, the militia building burned [ed. note: the building belonged to pro-Russian Chechens] and so Tuesday they bombed the village. I was afraid. I ran and then I fell. I was afraid for my baby so I left in the car with my father to come see Zarieta [OB/GYN at the MSF clinic]. I had already come last month. Today Zarieta told me that I need to be hospitalized. My baby's heartbeat is very weak. I had a Cesarean section when my first was born.*

*"I'm leaving today. It's been two days already that my son has been all alone with my mother. He's afraid when the bombing starts. He cries and he falls down. No, I can't stay here. They're not registering any more people. They're not taking more displaced Chechens. If there were space for me and my little one – a tent, a shed, something, a bit of help so we could eat – I would come right away, at least until I deliver. But it's impossible. The tent where my family lives here in Karabulak is already full. There are three families, ten children, in a tiny tent. They can't even share what little they have.*

*"I don't know how or where I'm going to have this baby. I don't want to stay at the hospital in Vedeno. No one dares stay there. It's too dangerous because of the bombing. Two weeks ago I went to Grozny with my sister to look for the doctor who delivered me the first time. I searched and searched but she's not in Grozny any more. So I'm not going to the central maternity hospital for the operation on December 5, as I'd planned. I'm going to talk it over with my family and decide where to go.*

*"How do we live there? We're in the cellar half the time. There's no help—just a little flour and sugar from the Danes [Danish Refugee Council] for the children. There are lots of soldiers in the village. They've set themselves up in the market and they fire their weapons every day. The people are afraid to go to the market though it's the only way to trade and to make a little money. It's the only way to survive. The soldiers roar by in their armored personnel carriers [APCs]. They frighten everyone. Then at night they come to the houses and demand food and drink. There are zatchiskas all the time. They come in the APCs, they close off the village, search house to house, and arrest the young men. The ones that are taken away never come back.*

*"The two sons in the house just across from us work for the militia<sup>8</sup>. The Russians came anyway. They broke windows, fired shots into the house, threatened to burn everything with gasoline, beat up one of the*

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<sup>8</sup> The militia was established by the pro-Russian Chechen administration to protect villages from rebel attacks. However, militia members, too, have begun fighting against the Russian army's arbitrary arrests and "cleansing campaigns."

sons who was there, and aimed their gun at the father's head. He gave his word that his sons would stop working for the militia."

### **Satsita, age 39 – Karabulak – Statement taken October 18, 2001**

Satsita looks like she is over 50. Overtaken by emotion and despair when she talks about her life today, she cries often. She lives in a house in Karabulak and is exhausted by the work required to feed her six children and pay for medical care for the youngest, who has a spinal disability.

We meet her at the entrance to MSF's OB/GYN clinic, housed in a trailer at the Bart campsite in Karabulak. She is here to seek advice for her adolescent daughter, who was afraid to come.

*"I'm from Khattuni, in the Veden district. The village is well known because of the bombings in 2000 that nearly destroyed the entire village. The house next to ours exploded and made a hole 8 meters deep. My house fell down like an elevator. I was wounded in the head and neck. I was five months pregnant. My son is 12 now. He's disabled and he can't walk. His back won't hold him up. When he was little, I went to Argun with him and I lost all my documents and his too – his disability card, everything.*

*"I arrived in Ingushetia six months ago. I pay 1000 rubles per month for a room filled with cockroaches in a house in Karabulak. Nine of us live there – my six children, my husband and I, and a nephew who was kidnapped once in Argun. His parents had to pay \$200 to get him back.*

*"I used to have such a good life! I worked as a teacher for 20 years. I had a beautiful house and four lovely daughters. I'm ashamed to ask for help today. I know how to sew so I started working, all the time, as a seamstress. I managed to borrow a machine but I'll never make it. The more I work, the more I spend. It's for my son. He needs massages and physical therapy. It's good for him but it's expensive. Here the doctors are always asking for money for everything. Everything costs. A person without money is a nobody here. I'm selling my jewelry, one piece after another, but my situation is so uncertain. I want to leave, to go anywhere, wherever I can feed my family."*

### **Roukiat, age 49 – Nassir-Kort – Statement taken October 19, 2001**

Her "home," a room of about 15 square meters, is newly painted, clean, and welcoming. It's in sharp contrast to the rest of the dirty, earthen building. Chickens and ducks run free. Roukiat lost two of her four sons in this war. The second disappeared on April 27, 2000, arrested during a round-up. Her older son was killed in September 2000 during a brutal zatchiska. Her other two sons and her husband have been jailed and tortured by the Russians.

*"I am from Tsotsi Yurt, a village known for its bravery. In 1919, Denikin's Russian soldiers were never able to take the village. More than 350 villagers died defending Tsotsi Yurt. And then again in 1995, our children – they're not boivikis – wouldn't let the Russians through. But the second war quickly became more dangerous because of the bombings and the soldiers coming at 4 o'clock in the morning to take our sons.*

*"Our village is wealthy thanks to oil. Many families live quite well. They have small, private oil-related businesses. That's why we're targets; it's not because we're boivikis.*

*"On April 11, 2000, I sent my third son out to the garden. We have a little plot of land on the outskirts of the village. We don't go there anymore, but I wanted to plant something for the cows. The soldiers arrested him. They kept him for 19 days in Goudermes, Shali and Khankala. Those were the worst days of my life.*

*"On April 27, I was outside. I heard shooting and I saw soldiers running. Then they blocked the road and no one could leave. My second son, Ruslam, is married. He lived with his wife in the house next door to ours. The soldiers came to our house. They wanted to take my youngest son, who's 15. I screamed, "Leave him, he's just a schoolboy!" Ruslam came, so they let Umar go and they took Ruslam. They beat him and took him away. He was my favorite son—the smallest, the weakest. The soldiers made fun of him because he hid his face; he was afraid of the blows.*

*“On the 30th, we got Imram back. I know from his friends that he was tortured, but he’s never talked about it. We started to look for Ruslam. They told us he was Udugov’s representative<sup>9</sup>. They knew it wasn’t true but that’s what they found for their reports to Moscow. We wrote to everyone but no one ever answered. All we got was a note from Kalamanov’s office (the Kremlin’s special representative for human rights in Chechnya) saying that our complaint had been registered.*

*“My husband went everywhere – to Pyatigorsk, to Nalchik, to Vladikavkaz, to Novorossiisk where there are so many prisons full of Chechens. We knew he’d been in Nalchik for two months and then had left for Rostov, so my husband went to Rostov. We are still looking for him.*

*“In September 2000, a zatchiska began in the village. My oldest son came to our house, saying, ‘There’s a war in the village!’ They took my youngest son, Umar, from a friend’s house. His friend came, crying. He said, ‘Why didn’t they take me instead of him?’ It’s a dishonor if someone is arrested in your house. They killed 13 that day. That’s when they killed my oldest son. I didn’t find out until later. The neighbors didn’t want to tell me. He had a wife and two children. I am heartbroken.*

*“Nine days later, Umar came back from Khankala. He’d been beaten, tortured. His back has been hurting ever since. I’m embarrassed to say this, but he urinates on himself. He can’t hold it in. He told me that they put stones in his mouth before beating him. ‘If you let one stone fall out while we’re hitting you, we’ll kill you,’ they said. I was ill for two months after that. I don’t know how I made it through the winter; how I managed to keep working at school I don’t remember.*

*“Last June, after four days of ‘cleansings,’ I thought they were finished so I decided to go to Shali with my second son, Imran, to continue his dental treatments. My husband came with us. An APC went by not far from the village, but we thought it was going to another village. But at the first checkpoint, they took my son and my husband. I couldn’t get back to the village so I went to Shali. Then there were three days of ‘cleansing’ in Kurchaloï. No one could leave. Finally, I went back on foot. That time they took more than half the village. They set up a ‘filtration camp’ on the hill at the edge of the village. All the women went there but they’d taken the men somewhere else.*

*“My husband came back the next day. He had broken bones. He couldn’t feel anything. He couldn’t stand up or lie down anymore. They’d thrown him down on the ground on his belly after they beat him. He suffered terribly. He prayed that another human being would take pity on him. A soldier allowed him to turn over on his back. The next morning, the soldiers refused to give back the passports. The same soldier put my husband’s passport in his shirt pocket and said to him, ‘Your son will be in Kurchaloï.’*

*“The third day, as soon as they opened the road, I went to Kurchaloï. I’d learned his name was on ‘the list,’ and I was so happy to know that! At least I wouldn’t have to wait for days without knowing. For a month I went there every day. As they didn’t have anything against him, they were waiting for someone to denounce him.*

*“On July 15, they let him go. No one could believe it. No one had ever heard of such a thing. All the neighbors came to congratulate us. That day, I decided to leave.*

*“My husband was a logistician in the emergency ambulance service. We negotiated with a driver who brought the four of us and some of our things here. My sister-in-law’s sister-in-law was already living in the other building here in Nassir-Kort. We spent a week with her and then we were able to move in here – a room full of roaches, without a window, without light. It was very hard, knowing that we were going to live there, in a cattle barn.*

*“My son and my husband fixed up everything themselves – the floor, the plaster, the painting, everything. We’ve got almost nothing here, but if you compare the poor conditions here with the danger there, we’ve got no choice. When I went to get winter clothes from our house, I found out that the ‘cleansing’ had gone on all summer long. The village was almost completely empty. On my street, there was only one family, with a young man. I invited him to come along and now he lives with us.*

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<sup>9</sup> Udugov sponsors a pro-rebel Internet site and is often identified as Maskhadov’s spokesman, which he denies.

*“At the end of August, after more than a month, the Migration Service finally gave in and agreed to register us. The DRC had us fill out a form. They came three weeks later to confirm that we were living where we said we were and they registered us, too. The ICRC said they were stopping their registration temporarily, but by the end of July they still hadn’t started again*

*“Winter is coming. It’s already cold and we have no heat. The ICRC came recently to give out stoves but they wouldn’t give us one because we already had this little electric stove. Do they think we’re going to warm ourselves on the burners?*

*“Go back? Of course we want to go back. Especially my two sons. Our heart is there. But as long as there’s no security or respect for human rights at home, we’re not returning. It’s not true that the Russians want the Chechens to go back to Chechnya. What they want is Chechnya without Chechens. They’ve left us only two solutions: leave or fight.”*

### **Khouda, camp commander, Logovaz – Nazran – Statement taken October 18, 2001**

Well hidden in the center of Nazran, the Logovaz camp is set up on the site of a market. Sixteen army tents have been erected in an empty area, surrounded by about 200 small huts. Living here are 1,870 people, along with an indeterminate number of rats, roaches, mice, cats, and dogs. Khouda takes us into a tent measuring 7 x 8 meters. Five families, totaling 45 people—of whom 13 are children—occupy half the space. One of the five families has two disabled children. Only 50 centimeters separates the space between the platform beds and the cooking area. The children burn themselves frequently.

For all intents and purposes, this is a dormitory. The residents must take turns sleeping. At night, the men sit in a corner and wait, smoking. During the day, when the children are at school and the women at the market, they can sleep for a few hours. The tent is falling apart. Its occupants have done what they can to repair the torn sections with cardboard or blankets, but despite their efforts, water seeps in when it rains. It is damp and cold. Cats and dogs enter, though not by the door. Huge roaches can be seen everywhere. Outside, worrisome whistling sounds come from the gas pipes that lay on the bare ground.

Khouda takes us to her residence, a former market stall facing the camp entrance.

*“Twenty-seven people live here in one room, including two from the first group who are disabled. We managed to make some space to separate ourselves, but we’re still piled one on top of another. And we’re the lucky ones. We were able to bring some things—rugs and blankets.*

*“All we’re asking for are some extra tents or materials to build little sheds, like you’ve done at Tanzila Kafe. We just want to ease the frightful crowding in these places. In the last two years, the children have gotten bigger and there are new babies. We’ve got to get rid of the ruined tents. They’re falling apart, so the cats and dogs come and go as they please! The UNHCR said they were going to replace half of them but at the last meeting they said, ‘Fix them yourselves.’ In the summer, people turn up the bottoms of the tents to dry them out. But now it’s raining and cold. When it rains, it’s a swamp in here. We’ve got to spread gravel everywhere.*

*“We have bread, but we don’t have enough space or heat. In the camp, people complain mostly about the crowding and the cold. For example, we don’t have any bunk beds like in the other camps. So in some tents, people have to take turns sleeping. The blankets from the ICRC don’t help. They don’t keep you warm at all.*

*“There’s another big problem – the men who don’t have passports. Between the two wars, Russia refused to issue new passports to Chechens. So now they don’t have any documents and they’re constantly stopped by the militia and have to pay them off. They’d rather stay where they are. They can’t go to the market or look for work. To get a passport, you’ve got to go to Grozny. But you can’t get past the checkpoints without a passport! Even if you do manage to get through by paying a pretty penny at each checkpoint, you’ve got to wait around to get the passport. But you can’t spend even an hour without documents in Grozny. It’s much too dangerous and if you get grabbed in a zatchiska, it’s all over. And anyway, they only give passports to students [ed. note: in Russia, the first passport is issued at 14 years old].*

*“Yes, people keep coming from Chechnya. Just last week, this young woman, a cousin of my husband, arrived from Argun. She lives here now with her baby.”*



**Aminat, age 23**, six months pregnant, tells her story in a raspy voice. *"I've been here a week and I'm already sick! The bombings in Argun were awful. That was on October 8 and 9. I came here. I couldn't stay there any longer. My husband was taken seven months ago in a zatchiska. He didn't have any papers. I haven't heard anything since then. There was a column of APCs. My husband and a friend were outside. They got scared and went into the nearest house. The Russians stormed in, tore everything apart, and took everyone away."*

*"I stayed because I didn't want to leave my mother-in-law. She refused to leave. But it got worse and worse; I couldn't stay any longer."*

*"Go back? Yes, I'll go back when the Russian army, the FSB [Russian Federal Security Service], the GRU [Russian Military Intelligence] and all the rest are gone."*

### **Zargan and Alek, ages 29 and 37 – Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 6, 2001**

The name of the company that owns these vacant warehouses in the Sleptsovskaya district (eastern Ingushetia) is Bogatyr, "the strong one." About 200 people have been living here for between six months and two years. Seven families live in the cellar of one building. It lacks windows and ventilation. Built of unfinished cement, cardboard walls close off its stalls. Roaches and mice torment the residents at night. Unprotected, the gas pipe lays on the bare ground in the dark hallway.

Zargan and Alek arrived here in September 2000 with their two daughters, ages 8 and 10. The younger girl has asthma. Their room is large but, like the others, it is unfit for human habitation. Moisture from the ground seeps through the ceiling and the walls. Poorly-laid plywood covering the floor is separating. The gas stove, open and lit, emits an unhealthy warmth. The light bulb on the ceiling flickers incessantly as the voltage drops. Alek speaks for the couple. Zargan suffers from high blood pressure and can't speak without crying.

*"We left in October 1999 at the beginning of the war. We were living in Grozny. We went first to live with my relatives and then we found a room in a private home. We stayed eight months and little by little we sold everything to pay the rent. We sold my wife's jewelry, my watch, my coat, the television... In September 2000, I knew there was room here. I'd worked here unloading trucks for the DRC. They were using one of the warehouses then. We came because we didn't have anything more to sell to pay the rent. When we got here, there was only one family living in the cellar. By the end of one month, it was full."*

*"How do we live here? The jackets hanging on the wall—those are our pillows. We don't have sheets; we don't have a blanket for each of us. Some neighbors lent us the two mattresses for our girls. Zargan and I sleep right on the wood. I bought one of the beds for 50 rubles in one of the camps and I fixed it up. People here gave us two more beds. We don't have any sheets. The people here gave us all the dishes we have. I traded one of the stoves that EMERCOM handed out for this gas cooker, which is in lousy shape. You can't use a stove here because there's no vent and no window."*

*"Every month we get a packet from the DRC and one from EMERCOM. That's all. The ICRC has never distributed anything here – no mattresses, no blankets, nothing. We have just food and the things you've given out [hygiene kits]. Two months ago, Zargan went to Grozny to get blankets. Our house is still standing but it's been looted of everything. When she was there, an APC exploded right nearby. The girls have been shaken up ever since."*

*"It's very damp here. When it rains outside, the walls are wet inside. There are roaches and rats everywhere. The little one has asthma and it's getting worse. Her eyes are always red and watery. She gets every allergy. My wife has blood pressure problems. We've already had to call the emergency medical services twice. When the medics got here, they said it wasn't surprising that her blood pressure was bad. As for me, my tuberculosis is being treated—more or less."*

*"One of the problems is that our passports and all our papers were destroyed during the first war when a rocket fell on our house. We have temporary papers but they've already expired. We'd have to go to Grozny to renew them, but I don't want to risk our lives for that."*

*“Go back? Yes, when they can guarantee our safety, when there’s no more bombing, no more inspections and cleansings, no more checkpoints... For now, our lives are at risk just because some drunken soldier might not like our looks.*

*“I don’t know when or how the war can end. It’s so complicated. Everyone is scheming. It’s a permanent sideshow. But I know one thing: the peaceful people suffer, die, and flee, while the people who are in on it on both sides make money and go to Turkey. It’s people like us who suffer, the people who want to live and work in peace.*

*“But stay here under these conditions? We can’t take that either. At least the children have some peace and can study. But in the springtime I’m going back. I’ll try to earn a little money. You can do a little business there selling cigarettes. And if God wills it, I’ll stay alive. But to settle here, that’s impossible.*

### **Khouzimat, age 101 – Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 6, 2001**

She lives in the corner of a barn at Bogatyr. Her tiny room is windowless. The walls and floor are covered with threadbare carpets. There are two metal beds because she is afraid to sleep alone. Plastic and cardboard cover the ceiling. She has no dishes or stove—only a little electric heater. She is slightly deaf but her mind is quite clear. It’s just that she’s forgetful, she says. She shows her feet, saying she wishes she could buy some new socks. Hers are so old.

*“My husband died eight years ago and my only son died three years ago. My sisters and brother died during this war. I am from Tangui-chu in the Urus-Martan district. I was born there in 1900. During the first war, I stayed there but my daughter-in-law took me away when the bombing started. After that, she left for Poland with her children.*

*“At first I lived with a woman in my family, next door. But they were ten people and it was too noisy. I couldn’t stay. The people who lived in this room left, so I moved in by myself.*

*“When it rains, water streams in through the ceiling. The last time I got sick, it took me six months to get better. The two beds belong to some neighbors. All I have are these two red blankets, this little prayer rug, and the cushion.*

*“I usually get help from the Danes, but they’ve already taken me off their list three times. I haven’t gotten anything for three months. Fortunately, the neighbors bring me a dish of food at night. And I bake bread outside.*

### **Noura, age 45 – Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 8, 2001**

MRO is a huge installation formerly used to house garages, auto and tractor repair shops, and warehouses. The brick buildings are falling down and rusted car frames are strewn about. Some repair shops still operate and Ingushetians bring their cars here to be fixed. Chickens, geese, and turkey run loose, scurrying near a huge garbage pit. On one side, the Rassvet tent camp houses more than 2,500 people. Many families—about a thousand people total—have moved into the vacant buildings.

Noura lives there in a tiny room with her husband, her remaining son, three of her four daughters, and her widowed oldest daughter’s two children. Barely a month ago, Noura lost her older son, a newlywed. Valid was 22. His wife is three months pregnant.

*“This isn’t a life; it’s a nightmare. Before, we had everything. We lived like normal people. Now we have to do everything in the same room – eat, wash, sleep. We’re eight people. We eat dust here. I can’t keep it clean; we don’t have enough water or cleaning products.*

*“We came here in October 1999, straight from Samachki, in the Achkhoy Martan region. We did everything ourselves. We bought the wood for the walls and we painted. Humanitarian aid groups gave us the beds, the mattresses, the blankets, everything.*

*“My son lived here in Ingushetia but since he got married last year, we rented him a little room near here, in Sleptovskaya, so he could set up housekeeping with his young wife. My husband worked to pay the rent, 500 rubles per month. He loaded and unloaded trucks. In September, my son wanted to go back to the house to take care of our livestock and make sure that everything was all right. I didn’t want him to go but he said everything was calm. He said he’d stay for just a week, sleep at my sister’s, and come back.*

*“He left on a Friday. On Saturday, they brought him back to me. It was Saturday, September 15. That morning he had been outside taking care of the cows and they bombed. He was badly wounded in the back. Three other people from the village, two women and a man, were also injured that day. A cousin brought him here and he spent three weeks in the hospital. They took bits of metal like this one out of his back (she holds up an egg-sized piece of metal). He was getting better. He could talk again, but then he began refusing food. He felt sick all the time and he died. His spine was broken but I didn’t think he was going to die. I thought he would be disabled but that he would live.*

*“On television we see people living in worse conditions than ours, like in Afghanistan. Thank God, we have our health. The children are used to the conditions we have to live under. But it’s really difficult for honest people who’ve never done anything wrong to live like this. Still, going back is out of the question as long as there are Russian soldiers at home. They talk to us about stabilization but I say, to hell with their stabilization. Look what it did to my son, their ‘stabilization.’ We need them to get out, all of them.*

### **Satsita, 32 – Sleptovskaya – Statement taken November 8, 2001**

Satsita lives with her husband, Moussa, and their two sons in a tiny shed next to one of the abandoned MRO buildings. The transformer and other electrical installations are nearby. The shed used to look like an open tower but they added a roof, a fourth wall and an overhang to create a kitchen, turning it into a miniature house (2.5 meters x 2.5 meters). Satsita is seven months pregnant and receives prenatal care at the MSF clinic set up at the far end of the MRO installation. She is having a healthy pregnancy. “Here,” she says, “there are no planes bombing us.”

*“We held on for a year in Grozny, but by August 2000 we couldn’t stand being in the cellar any longer. The bombings terrified the children, there was no gas, the electricity was always being cut, the mines were a daily threat, and there wasn’t any work so that we could feed the children.*

*“We came straight here to MRO and people the helped us. There wasn’t anything ‘available,’ no room available, of course. We didn’t have money to buy space in a tent. We did everything ourselves. I found work sometimes in a bakery so we could buy materials. We put on the roof, painted, installed the gas and electricity, put up the door and the window, covered the ground with cement... Now I can’t work any longer and my husband has sciatica, so he can’t do heavy work. My sister-in-law is going to come live with us. She’s too afraid to stay in Grozny any longer. She’ll be able to help me when I have the baby.*

*“We went back to Grozny three months ago. Our house had burned. We have nothing left. The situation is far worse than before we left and, of course, worse than here. At least we are warm and we have water nearby. You can live here, more or less.*

### **Mariat, age 43 – Sleptovskaya – Statement taken November 9, 2001**

In the middle of the MRO installations, a long building houses a tractor repair shop. Huge pulleys and winches still hang from the metal beams that crisscross the ceiling. In the middle of the cement floor, leftover tools, material, and auto body parts are gathered in a heap. Twisted and rusted scrap metal spills from the wire netting meant to contain it. Across the way, displaced Chechens have built little rooms from odds and ends. The noise level is deafening – televisions, radios, crying infants. As we pass, people gather to tell their stories. The 10 or 15 families have been here for a year or two, but are not registered as displaced Chechens at MRO. The Sleptovskaya Migration Service refuses to add them to the already-long list, claiming that some of the families, coming from the private sector, are already included on the DRC or ICRC lists.

*"I came to Ingushetia at the beginning of the war. I rented a room in Nazran with my three children. Then I went back to find my husband. He was the deputy director of the Alkhan-Kala administration, but he was killed in November 2000. They shot him one night as he was coming home, just in front of the door. A week later, they killed the director.*

*"Of course they said it was the rebels, but the city was completely occupied and surrounded by the Russians. How could 'bandits' have entered the town and circulated inside? I think it was the special services who did these things and then blamed the boivikis.*

*"Overall, it was calm there. The Russians stayed on the outskirts of the village. But when they would get drunk at night, they'd come into the houses and demand money, food, whiskey... They were brutal. And then they started the zatchiskas; they'd beat up just anyone. It was horrible. Once my father was at home alone when they came. They burst in, made him lie down on the floor, and they beat him, yelling, 'Tell us where your lousy bandit sons are!' When they left they took the television, carpets, and the VCR.*

*"In May, I decided to leave. The months up to then had been very hard. I get a widow's pension of 2500 rubles, but I couldn't make it. My sister, who's a widow, too, was already living here. I came to her and little by little, I built a room for my family. I had to buy everything, down to the last nail."*

### **Louisa, age 39 – Altievo – Statement taken November 8, 2001**

This is another farm that has been converted into living space (if you could call it that) for the displaced: three long earthen buildings, roofs in need of repair, lopsided rooms built along the side. The walls are made of cardboard, blankets, plywood and plastic. There is no privacy here, either. The noise – a neighbor's radio, the children's cries, a television turned up somewhere – reverberates from one end of the building to another. Louisa is worried about her brother-in-law's young daughter who is coughing and has a fever. Louisa lives in a 6m x 2.5m room with six other people: her husband, her brother-in-law and his child, her mother-in-law, and her two sons, 16 and 11. She lost her 3 year-old daughter early in the war. The child died of pneumonia when the family moved into the basement of their house to take refuge from the bombing.

*"This is our third winter here. There was nothing when we arrived. We did everything ourselves. But the roof still leaks. The toilets are disgusting, completely full. They've been that way since we got here and there are only seven for the entire camp. The humanitarian aid organizations parade through, one after the other, make promises, and never come back. Before, EMERCOM brought us hot meals but that ended in the spring. We get food from DRC and the ICRC handed out buckets and stoves, but we don't have enough blankets and mattresses.*

*"What we need most of all is health care and medication. There is a medical office but it's open only once a week and they have almost nothing. They give prescriptions in half-doses! I need an operation [removal of an ovary], and my husband is looking for work to pay for it. My 11 year-old son, Anzor, has bad toothaches and I can't afford to pay for his care.*

*"Oktyabrsky, our district in Grozny, was completely destroyed. I went there last week. I slept at my sister's. The gunfire went on all night long. Still, I really wanted to go home. I sleep better there. But it's awful in Grozny. There are mines everywhere. It's all in ruins and they kill this person, they take that one away... But you're always better on your own land, right? Anyway, we'll have to go back. We're grateful to Achev but we can't stay forever. But as long as the war continues, and as long as they let me stay here...*

*"The hardest thing is to be separated from my family. Since the beginning of the war, my mother and my three brothers and sisters have been in Georgia. My family is from Itum-Kale [ed. note: the mountains in southern Chechnya], so they fled through the mountains. I haven't seen them in more than two years.*

### **Bella and Abou, ages 27 and 30 – Altievo – Statement taken November 8, 2001**

An old sunflower oil factory faces the state farm's vacant buildings. The scene is typical of the former USSR's industrial landscape—rusted storage tanks, broken windows, discarded shells, and a general state of decay—but despite appearances, it still operates. Nearby, some 43 refugee families have set themselves

up as best they can in sheds, a hangar, and a little house. In one of the buildings, with cement block walls and concrete floors, people are at work fixing the insulation. But they don't have enough wood to put roofs on their sheds. The ICRC was here recently distributing stoves – six for 43 families. The damp and cold are palpable.

Further away, a small house stands where the factory watchman must have lived. The living conditions are much better there—almost normal. Abou, Bella, their three daughters (7, 4 and 2 ½), and three relatives live here. Abou is in bed with his leg in a cast. On October 4, a reckless driver hit him on an Ingushetia road. They've just learned that their eldest daughter has hepatitis.

*"We arrived here from Grozny in early September. Before, you didn't dare leave. There wasn't room here and it was hard to register for a bit of help. We waited until we were sure of having a place, this house. You couldn't live there any longer, especially not a man my age. If the Russians arrest you, you're either killed or you're beaten and your family has to pay \$3000 to get you free. The aid doesn't get to people, especially in Grozny. It's a little better in the villages, but still, they give out 10 kilos of flour per family whether you have three people or 15 to feed.*

*"Our parents stayed. The old folks don't want to leave. They say they'd rather stay and die on their land. They're the ones who pushed us to leave. We couldn't take anymore of the 'cleansings,' the gunfire day and night... Then you've got to feed the children. The only thing that brings in a bit of money in Grozny is driving a taxicab but it's very dangerous, too.*

*"I got the car, we stuffed everything we could inside it, and we came here. I knew people. I'd come ahead to check out the place and I also have contacts in the Migration Service. We were able to register right away, and later we registered with the DRC and the ICRC. Finally, we can live almost normally. There's no bombing here.*

*"When I was in the hospital to have my leg operated on, I saw how the staff pretended to register the displaced in front of the ICRC so they didn't have to pay. But as soon as the ICRC people are gone, you've got to pay for everything, even the surgeon's gloves. I paid 3000 rubles altogether for the care and medications and that doesn't even include the operation. They guy who hit me paid the surgeon."*

### **Markha, age 37, and Zarema, age 24 – Nazran – Statement taken November 8, 2001**

A tiny square is wedged between buildings in the middle of Nazran. Cigarettes and chocolate bars are for sale at a few market stalls. Past an opening a bit further away, a stairway heads below ground, leading to what must have been a small storehouse for the market vendors. But since November 1999, more than 40 members of the same family have been living in this vast, concrete cellar where the damp has left the walls streaked with moisture. They've piled up empty cardboard boxes to make partitions and protect themselves a bit from the cold. The room looks like a huge gypsy camp, except that it's a dark and grim cellar. Buckets, cardboard, bags of food and clothes are everywhere. Blankets and clothing are hung from the walls. Children eat and play. Sleeping benches line the walls. The smell of mold is intense. Among the residents are Markha, the only one without children and one of the six daughters of the family on the left side, and Zarema, a young mother on the right side. Her husband is busy making a cradle for Rayan, their six-month old daughter. "Ray" means paradise in Russian, so the name would be the equivalent of Eden if it existed in Russian.

#### **Markha:**

*"We're from Alkhan Yurt. We arrived in November 1999. First, we stayed with some people we knew but we had to leave after one month. There were too many of us. My mother and father, five sisters, two brothers, and about fifteen children live in this half of the cellar.*

*"What's really awful here is the damp. Did you see the walls and the ceiling? It drips. The children are always sick and coughing. Thank God, they haven't had anything serious up to now. This will be our third winter here.*

#### **Zarema:**

*"The sheets and blankets are so damp that we can't sleep. In the summer, we put them out to dry every day but now it's too cold and damp outside. They don't dry. And soon it will freeze. Our clothes fall apart,*

*everything rots – the flour, the linens. And we don't even have a stove, just this heating element. Five families live together on this side: my mother, four married children, and their own children. We're fifteen here permanently, plus the people who come and go from Chechnya.*

*"I already lost one brother during the first war. He had tuberculosis. The Russians beat him and he began to bleed. We couldn't go to the hospital and we had nothing – no bandages, nothing. We couldn't save him.*

*"We're here to save our men and our sons. "*

### **Chirvan, age 21 – Karabulak – Statement taken November 9, 2001**

A huge state farm and former kolkhoz, MTF Karabulak is still in operation. Cows and people cohabit in some of the buildings.

Chirvan is spending some time at his aunt Assiat's "house," a tiny room cobbled together in one of the large cowsheds. Five people usually live here: Assiat, her husband, and their three children. There are eight people there now, including Chirvan, his mother, Kamieta, and one of his sisters. In a few days, the three will return to Chechnya. Joking, Chirvan says, *"I remember when we'd go away after work to the mountains or the sea to relax for a few days. Now, this is our 'spa!'"* He's referring to a room of a few square meters. Plastic barely covers the ceiling. The inhabitants laid concrete over the dirt floor themselves. Everyone sleeps together on a bench, which takes up half the space. Blankets are stretched over the walls, barely covering the stone.

*"I live on the outskirts of Goudermes, a little village. A month ago, the zatchiskas were still going on. My mother cried and begged so much that I agreed to leave. A few days earlier, some people from the village had been arrested. They even took 13 and 14 year-old children. I didn't want to leave. I'm innocent. I'm a free man. I never fought against the Russians. Why should I have to flee my home?"*

*"Goudermes is between a forest and a big road. Even when there are no rebel attacks, the Russians bomb the forest because they say the rebels are hiding there. As for the last so-called attack and the huge battle, that's the Russian media's story. I can tell you nothing happened. They just said that to destabilize the region and launch the 'cleansings.' It happens every day! The problem is that bombs fall regularly on villages or on civilians out in the countryside. The old people and the children are terrified.*

*"Me, fight? What good would that do? Even if I had a kalashnikov, I couldn't do anything against the airplanes! Even if I wanted to fight, my parents wouldn't let me. And it's not a war, it's 'business.' They steal the women's jewelry, carpets, valuable things, and they send packages to their girlfriends in Russia. The ones who work the checkpoints don't want to leave Chechnya. They make a lot of money from ransom they collect from the drivers. It's impossible to get justice.*

*"For those who've stayed in Chechnya, the men, it's impossible to work. It's the women who do everything, even the hard work. If there were space here for us, we'd gladly stay. But here, you've got to fight for the right to get a little bit of aid. It's as if we didn't have the right to be refugees. I'm not afraid of the sweeps and the zatchiskas. I've done nothing wrong. But I really can't take the bombings anymore.*

**Kamieta, age 48**, his mother, speaks up: *"Work isn't the problem. We've had enough of war. We want to live in peace. When will this stop? Why is there always the sound of 'boom, boom, boom?' Why must we run to the cellar early in the morning, in the middle of the night, and then wait for hours, huddled on the ground, terrified, for the bombing to end? Tell them in the west -- they've got to stop the war."*

### **Sultan and Laïssa, ages 45 and 42– Karabulak – Statement taken November 9, 2001**

They live with their five children (from 2 1/2 to 18) in a room 12 meters x 12 meters. They, too, share space with livestock in a big shed on a large collective farm. The rickety huts built by the displaced line the building walls. Sultan has difficulty hiding his shame and disappointment. Seven people sleep on a bench that is 2.5 meters wide. The room is relatively well-maintained and partitioned off from the others. Newly-arrived from Chechnya, they are destitute, even if lucky to have found this place to live. They must borrow flour from neighbors. They will return the flour if and when they get their first food aid allocation. A

neighbor who arrived before they did explains: “People have to wait at the DRC and ICRC offices for two or three months before they decide to put the new arrivals on their lists. And meanwhile, how are people supposed to live?”

*“We arrived three weeks ago from the Vedeno region. We didn’t come sooner because we didn’t have enough money for the trip and to settle ourselves here. But we couldn’t stay there any longer, especially with the children. In two weeks, my daughters (8 and 11) only went to school for one or two days. And the little one, she’s 2 ½, when she sees the trucks and the APCs, she cries out, ‘The Russians are here, the Russians are here!’ When she sees planes, she’s the one who yells, ‘Get to the cellar, to the cellar!’ You understand? At 2 ½? And I’m not even talking about my sons, 16 and 18. They won’t leave the house anymore.*

*“Since the summer it’s gotten really unbearable. Any day, a bomb could fall on our house. One of my sons could disappear. We were already spending a lot of time in the cellar, but it got worse every day. The children were more and more terrified, traumatized. The men always stayed in their houses. That’s why, thank God, none of us ever had any problems.*

*“I’m an ambulance driver for the Vedeno hospital emergency department. I kept working, but there’s no pay and the vehicles are falling apart. One of the two hospital buildings is nothing more than a pile of ruins. The other is still standing and the doctors are working in spite of everything, without gas, with electricity blackouts that sometimes last two weeks. People don’t want to stay in the hospital. Women who’ve given birth go right back home for fear of bombings. The doctors do their best. They get a little bit of humanitarian aide, medications, from time to time.*

*“I borrowed some money and came first by myself to find a roof for my family. People from my village helped me get this room. The people who lived here built a little shack outside and we took their place. (He leaves the impression that he had to pay for the room but refuses to talk about it directly.)*

*“We’re not registered on any lists so for now we’re not getting any help. It’s very difficult because our money is already gone. The Migration Service took our names. The people who lived here before got bread from EMERCOM. We tried to explain and take their place on the list but EMERCOM refused. Today my two sons and I went to the fields to gather potatoes.*

*“Some strange things have happened to us here. In Dechny-Vedeno, we got aid from the DRC. When I got to Ingushetia, I went to explain our situation to the DRC office so they would take our names off the lists in Chechnya and add us to the lists here. They did take our names off the first list. As for the second step, we’re still waiting. Luckily, the neighbors help us as best they can. Yesterday, someone gave us some rice.*

*“We’ve got no choice. We’ve got to stay here and live in these humiliating conditions. As long as we can stay, as long as the authorities don’t force us to go back, telling us the war is over, we’ll stay here.”*

### **Moussa, age 54 – Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 10, 2001**

At the Rassvet tent camp on the MRO grounds in Sleptsovskaya, Saïd, the camp director, recites his complaints. Most of the displaced here share them. “1,880 registered people live here, plus around another one hundred new people who aren’t registered,” he says. “Ninety percent of the tents are old and worn out. It’s already the third year. They’ve said they will fix them and replace others, but when? It’s already the middle of November. They haven’t gotten blankets or mattresses in more than a year. There aren’t enough stoves. We need around 60 more. They promised to bring those, too, but it’s already cold and we’re still waiting. The new arrivals are building their own sheds because they can’t get tents. But the HCR doesn’t want to give them materials, even though they distribute a little to people in tents. Boredom is another problem. People have no work, no interests, the men drink, people even talk about drugs. Luckily, there’s no fighting.”

Saïd takes us to Moussa’s living space, half of a large and clean tent, the walls hung with white drapes like a field hospital. Moussa lives here temporarily with his wife and four children.

*"I came here from Shali two weeks ago. We were living in Grozny, but our house burned down at the beginning of the war and we moved in with my brother, in Shali. At first it was calm. There wasn't too much bombing. It started later. One time, in 2000, they killed 470 all at once when people in Shali had gathered to collect their pensions.*

*"We couldn't stay with my brother any longer. We were a burden on his family. But the worst is that nearly every day now, young people disappear in the night. The Russians come to the houses, they say that such-and-such a young man is a boiviki; they beat him, and take him away. Some never show up again. The others' bodies are found a little later out in the countryside.*

*"I was a driver-dispatcher but I've been out of work since the beginning of the war. We survived on what we'd stored up and we sold our possessions, our dishes and glassware, to buy food. Around three months ago, my wife went to her family here in Sleptsovsk, but I couldn't live with them. That goes against our custom. Then I heard that a new camp was going to be built, with about 50 tents, in Alina or Satsita. That's why I finally came. But no camp was ever built, so we ended up here.*

*"My old neighbor from Grozny let me use this corner of the tent. They've squeezed in 8 or 9 people on one side to make room for us. They also help us with food. They give us some bread. We're fine here, but I've got to find a place somewhere else before winter. I'd really like to build a little shed nearby. But they haven't given us any building materials. I'm going to borrow a little here, ask around there, buy what I can and make the best of the fact that it's not too cold yet."*

### **Natasha, age 43 – Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 10, 2001**

Her husband died from an illness last April. She has five adolescent children to feed – three sons, 16, 18 and 19; and two daughters, 12 and 15. Already poor, the family is now completely destitute and must rely entirely on help from neighbors, the camp director, and others nearby. Housed for now in a tent at the Rassvet camp in Sleptsovskaya, Natasha fears she could become homeless at any moment.

*"I don't even have a bed for my two daughters. Since we arrived in September from Alkhan Kala, I have been everywhere – to Alina, Sputnik, Satsita. But there, you have to pay for an empty tent. Here, I go begging to each tent. One man who went back to Chechnya for a while lent me half his tent, just until I find a place.*

*"I have three big boys. Two were taken this summer in the zatchiskas. They were beaten horribly, even though the oldest is handicapped. He stepped on a mine 1 ½ years ago. He lost a leg and two fingers. They beat him anyway and he's had bad psychological problems since then. We absolutely couldn't stay any longer.*

*"When the war started, my brothers and sisters all left. We were very poor, and my husband was ill with heart problems. But after what happened this summer, one of my sisters came to help us and brought us here.*

*"No, I'm not registered anywhere. I don't know what you're supposed to do. I'm lost. I don't know how we're going to manage to live here.*

### **Khava, age 38– Sleptsovskaya – Statement taken November 10, 2001**

Khava's situation is just the opposite. Her family (husband, three little girls and her) occupies half of a tent. It's clean and well-stocked. There are more beds than people, plenty of mattresses and blankets. A stove hums away in the midst of it all. The living conditions are hardly opulent but they are acceptable. Acceptable, that is, if we can judge the living conditions of people who've lost everything and continue to fear for the lives of their loved ones.

*"We're from the Mikrorayon district in Grozny. We arrived here in October 1999, at the beginning of the war. It's going all right here, more or less, except there are holes in the roof. As soon as it rains, the water runs everywhere. We put pots underneath. And when it's cold, everyone turns on their gas and there's less pressure so everyone is cold. Human beings shouldn't live in such conditions.*



*"I'd just like to tell you a story about something that happened to my neighbor from Grozny. Last week, I went back there to collect the children's benefit payments. I went to my building to see my neighbor and friend. That's the second building I lived in Grozny because the first one was totally destroyed. Half of this one is still standing. She greeted me and began to cry. She told me that two nights earlier, five masked men came to her place. They spoke Russian. They forced her to open the door, began beating her husband, took her jewelry and finally put a gun to his head so that she would tell them which apartments still had people living in them. She had to go with them, floor by floor, lie to her neighbors so they would open the door in the middle of the night, and then be a witness to terrible violence each time someone opened up. They wanted money, jewelry and valuables. In one apartment, the woman had nothing to give so they beat the man who was there, her cousin. She was crying and pleading, but they said, 'You'd better figure something out! Find money!'*

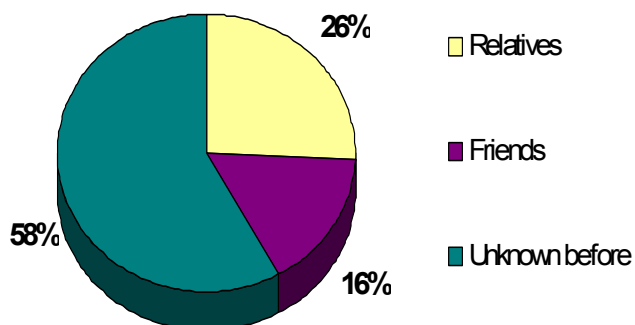
*"This war is big business for the Russians. Why would they leave? It will never end. They're making too much money here. Like at the checkpoints, they collect 30, 50 or 100 rubles from every car. And you, with your work, what difference will that make? None, because no one believes us anyway."*

## *Appendix II:*

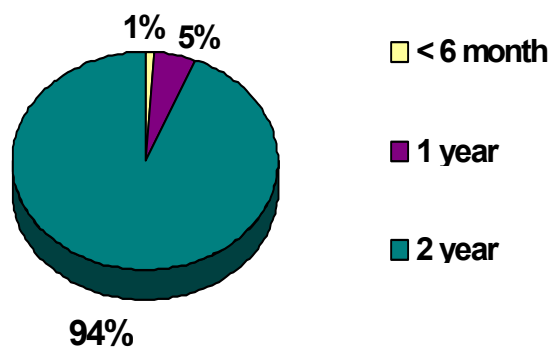
### *Main Results of MSF Housing Condition Survey Conducted in Ingushetia*

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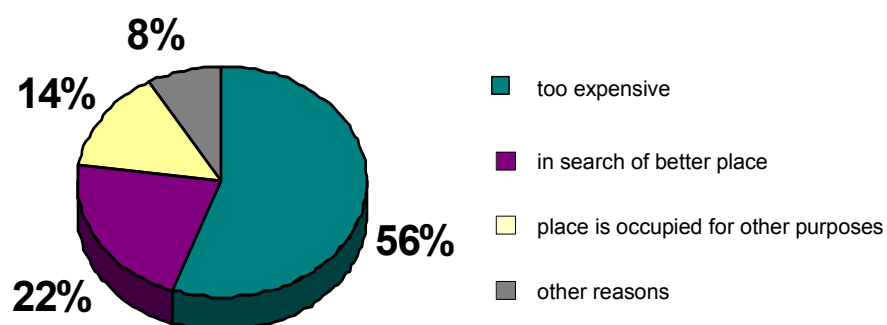
**Relationship of Displaced Persons to Host Families**



**Length of stay in Ingushetia**

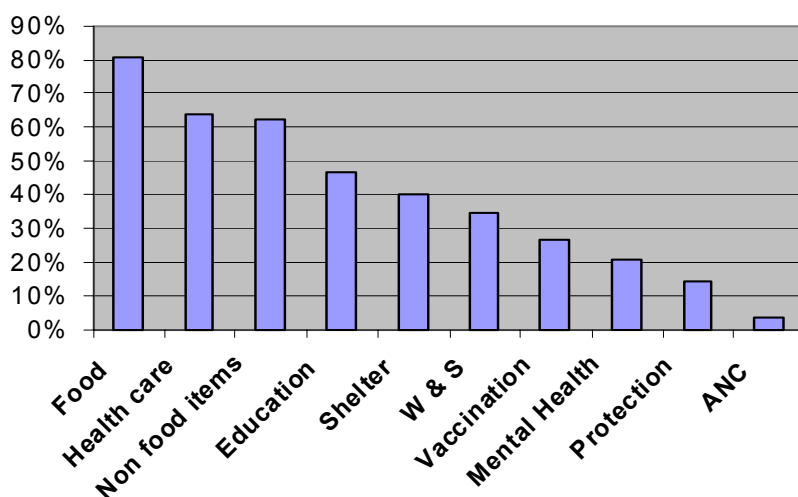


### Reason for moving within Ingushetia

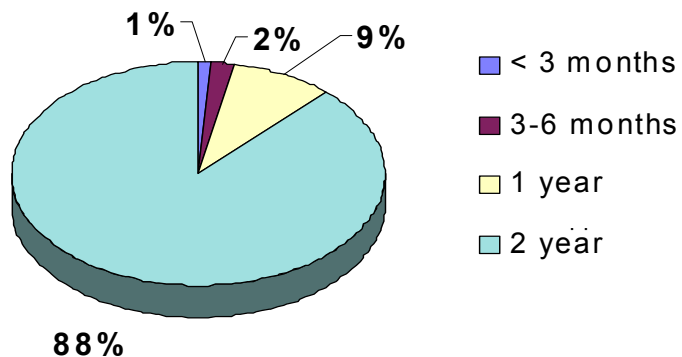


More than half of the displaced have moved at least once, a majority of them because they could not afford the room they were renting.

### Main humanitarian needs as identified by displaced persons in host families

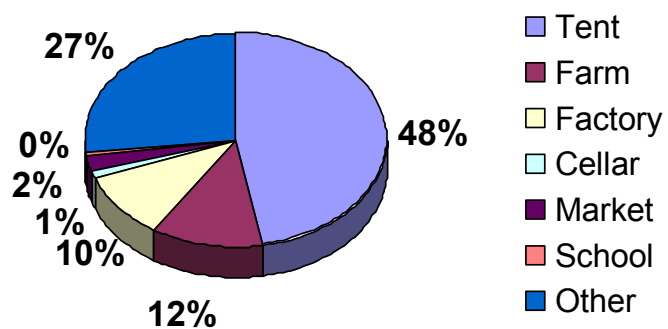


### Displaced Persons Living in Collective Settlements and Tent Camps: Length of stay in Ingushetia



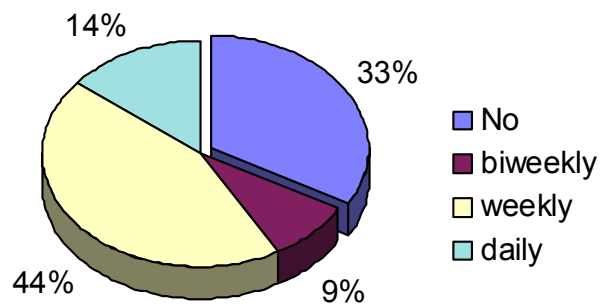
About 90% of the displaced in the collective sector have been living in Ingushetia for over 2 years.

### Habitation



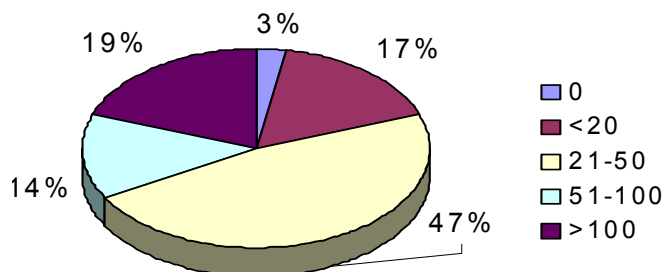
About half of displaced from the collective sector live in tents.

### Waste Collection



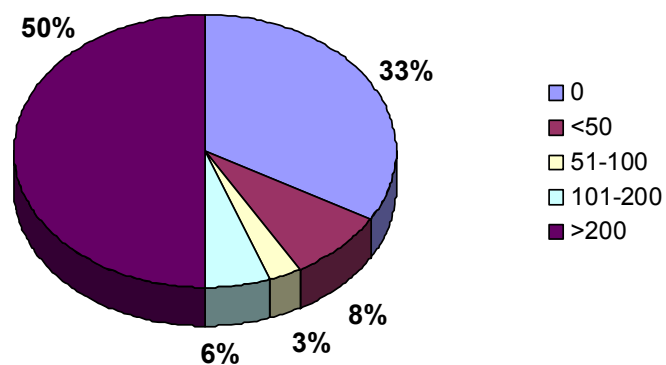
- 33% of the camp administrators surveyed said that garbage was not collected in the settlements.

### Number of persons per latrine



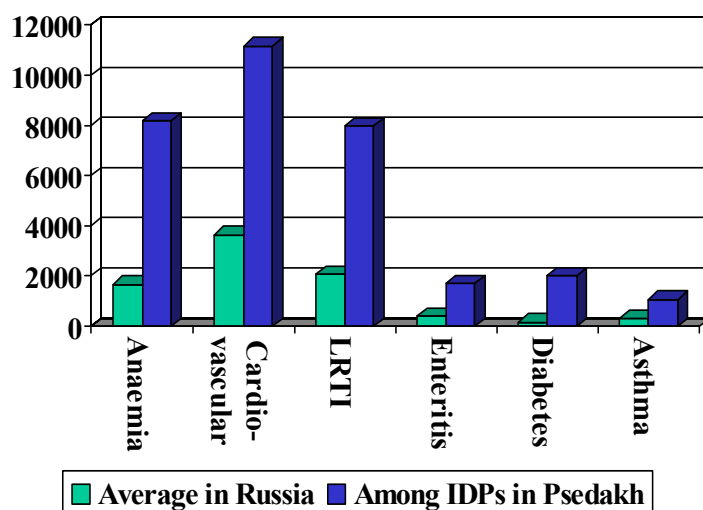
- The internationally recognized standard in a post-emergency phase is one latrine per 20 persons. More than 80% of the displaced share latrines with more than 20 other persons.

### Number of persons per shower



- Half of the displaced share one shower with more than 200 other persons.

### Comparative incidence of selected groups of diseases in 2001 (number of diseased per 100,000 inhabitants)



## *Appendix III: MSF Programs to Assist Displaced Chechens*

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The year 2001 marked the 10th anniversary of Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) beginning work in the Russian Federation. MSF first came to the former Soviet Union in December 1988 to carry out emergency relief work in the aftermath of the earthquake in Armenia. Today, MSF assists vulnerable populations in nine CIS countries. Programs range from emergency distributions of relief items in conflict zones to longer-term efforts to fight epidemics such as tuberculosis and AIDS.

Since the resumption of war in Chechnya in 1999, MSF has provided humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) who began fleeing Chechnya and poured into neighboring Ingushetia. In the Malgobeck district, Nazran, and Karabulak, MSF doctors and nurses provide medical and gynecological consultations. Local hospitals and clinics are supplied with medicine and medical equipment to help the Ingush health system cope with the burden created by the influx of IDPs. MSF teams also distribute emergency relief items, including blankets, children's clothes, stoves, and hygiene kits, to IDPs living in collective centers. They also carry out construction and repair work to improve the sanitary and living conditions of the displaced.

In Chechnya, despite the ravages of two wars and years without payment of salaries or new equipment, many hospitals and clinics continue to function. MSF is helping to restart the health system. MSF teams distributed medicines and medical equipment to 25 health facilities throughout Chechnya in 2000. They worked directly in six health facilities in Grozny, three in the Chatoi region, and they carried out rehabilitation work in the surgical facilities of two of Chechnya's key hospitals and in the maternity of Grozny. In the summer of 2001, MSF helped rebuild the 45-bed maternity ward at the central hospital of Goudermes.

In the republic of Dagestan, MSF donates basic medical kits to health posts and clinics along the Chechen border. The organization also distributes relief items and offers medical consultations in collective centers in the city of Khazaviurt. Many of the area's displaced people were either uprooted from their homes within Dagestan during the first phase of the conflict or came later from Chechnya.