

CAUCASUS FOUNDATION REPORT VI

Thousands of Obstacles in front of the Humanitarian Aid:

## **FIRE DANCE OF NGOs IN CAUCASUS**

*by*

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## **THE EXPERIENCES OF THE NGOS IN CAUCASUS**

Since September 1999 when 401 thousand people have turned out to be refugees, the Chechen history has become the source of incredible tragic stories, and since the arrival of the first UNHCR aid in the region in Ingushetia via Stavropol on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1999, humanitarian aid volunteers and the workers have lived through lots of experienced full of risk.<sup>1</sup>

As some sector have shrunk to a great extent and some have totally collapsed after the political crises that started in 1990 and the war conditions that have existed since 1994, in all field some illegal activities have been observed and have accelerated. After a certain point although it is not compatible with the general nature of the society, the illegal behaviours have turned out to be common practice.

There still exists a war case in Chechnya for 11 years which has been fighting a war of independence against the Russian Federation. Besides, the actions which are totally unacceptable in the Chechen culture such as abduction and asking for ransom, robbery and bribery, are continuing as criminal mechanisms and destroying the texture of the society in a way that will be decade's work to recover. Unfortunately, this criminal mechanism is also harming the activities of international and independent aid organisations.

However, the existence of such criminal groups is not the only and even major agent hindering the humanitarian aid that is meant to be sent Chechnya.

Despite having to pause their efforts, the humanitarian aid organisations have tried to provide help for Chechnya and Chechen refugees.

### **THE BASE OF HUMANITARIAN AID: INGUSHETIA**

With the sponsorship of humanitarian aid organisations, the EU and UNHCR, and UN organisations such as the World Food Programme -WFP, and UNICEF have the lead role in the help. Only one third of the NGOs that exist in the North Caucasus can function in Chechnya.

The Agency for Rehabilitation, the Islamic Relief, the Salvation Army and the Austrian Hilfswerk are only some of these organisations.

Because of several reasons these organisations cannot base their activities in Chechnya but in the neighbouring Ingushetia. This first happened because Ingushetia had the majority of refugees, but later the situation was enhanced because of security reasons. After a while, because aid could not be safely arrived at the destinations people resorted to fleeing to Ingushetia to get help.

The highest numbers were 350 thousand refugees, but the average number has generally been between 150- 220. Aid organisations based in Nazran have complained about sudden assaults of supervision. When the aid convoys were about to head for their destinations either the Russian collaborator Chechen rulers or people who introduce themselves as "Refugee Department" authorities would come to their offices and asked for all kinds of certificates, documents and such to a dissuasive extent.

### **NON- DESIGNATED BARRIERS: BUREAUCRACY**

The biggest obstacles on the way of international humanitarian aid were the ones lived because of the barriers set up by bureaucracy. The Russian Federation keeps playing the visa and work permit cards against the activities of these aid organisations very efficiently. Provision of these documents means a hassle of several months. Apparently, people in need and in war conditions cannot wait for help to arrive so long. Such delays can only aggravate the situation. Because of such obstacles the organisations choose to go to the area with normal visas. Nevertheless, this put the NGOs in an illegal status. This also highly aggravates the risk for them to be in an area of war. The Russian bureaucracy which is normally very lethargic gets worse when an aid project for Chechnya is the issue. They use this as a weapon to intentionally put help organisations into illegal positions.

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<sup>1</sup> First 4 trucks from Stavropol carrying 80 tons of urgent humanitarian aid supplies arrived at Nazran after 10 hours of a night travel. During that time, most of the refugees who fled from the Russian military bombardments were at Sunjinski region of Ingushetia. (according to the information given by UNHCR spokesman Kris Janowski in a press conference in Geneva on 1 October 1999)

As Oscar Braun, NGO officer and an independent reporter, observes more than half of the humanitarian help organisations that have managed to enter Chechnya are conceived as illegal organisations by the Russian authorities as they have not been able to complete the procedures.<sup>2</sup> Thus the organisations have had to choose the illegal alternative to be able to fulfil their responsibilities.

In fact, there is another issue that has not been expressed. Even if all the documents are complete and legal, the aid carriers are subjected to illegal action by the Russian soldiers at dozens of points on their way to the help destination. Even if you have all your documents you will have to bribe the soldiers to reach your target. People can only overcome these barriers bribery.

Russian Ministry of Justice' registry office requires that all the details about the workings of these organisations, their status, banks accounts and all possible documentation. Following each application, the Russian intelligence carries out many investigations. There are scrutinizing procedures following each permission as well.

A while ago, there was decreed a rule for Chechnya that all the NGOs had to be sponsored by organisations such as UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and the EU, and the organisations are supposed to get registered in both Russia and Chechnya.

5 days before an NGO is going to enter Chechnya, information as to the route, purposes and accommodation places must be given to Chechnya's government and the FSB's in the region. While Russian security forces and Chechen state officers accompany these aid convoys, the NGOs are not allowed to take their own security people with them.

#### **RUSSIAN APPROACH**

According to official statements, there is active cooperation with international organisations so as to establish peaceful life conditions in Chechnya. Russian Minister of Social and Economic Affairs Vladimir Yelagin expressed in January 2002 that the Russian Federation took over three responsibilities: Providing security, repairing houses and assuring survival conditions in Chechnya.<sup>3</sup>

However, these statements were uttered after three years of struggle. Within the period that has passed after these statements were made nothing has changed in terms of the NGOs negative experiences.

#### **EASIEST BLAME TO PUT: SPYING**

The most common accusation made for the humanitarian aid providers is their being 'spies'. Whether they are only newspaper reporters, human rights' representatives, or humanitarian aid officers or volunteers in line with old tradition everybody is accused of being a spy by Russians.

#### **PROBLEMS IN ENTERING CHECHNYA**

Any aid transporters that want to enter Chechnya via Nazran, have to get special permission from the local Chechen authorities who are Russian allies and a permission from the Khankale Russian headquarters based in Grozny, the capital.

The biggest handicap here for the NGO member is having to travel kilometres away to the centre from Nazran which is very risky.

In fact this is all conspiracy as these people do not have entry permissions anyway. Thus they are sent back from the first checkpoint. Under the circumstances they have to rely on other people who have managed to enter the region before as NGO members, or someone who has managed to enter there with their private passports. The other alternative is having to risk illegal means, i.e. bribing people to be able to get to Grozny, which means having to face the risk of death as well.

Even when they have a permission letter from the Russian troops' regional commander General Vladimir Moltenskoy, NGO officers face all sorts of problems at dozens of checkpoints they are stopped. There are as it is claimed, 20 checkpoints between Nazran and Grozny.

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<sup>2</sup> *"Obstacles to Humanitarian Aid in the Northern Caucasus"*, Oscar Braun, Prague Watchdog, September 26th 2001, [www.watchdog.cz](http://www.watchdog.cz)

<sup>3</sup> *"Russia, Humanitarian Agencies Actively Cooperate in Chechnya"*, ITAR-TASS, 17 Jan 2002

Whether Moltensky's certificates and signature is valid or not is up to the soldiers who stop you and you are at their mercy. When they claim the document is fake the only thing to be done is bribing them. This practice keeps the bribery market on its feet. This applies to civilian Chechens as well. A Chechen cannot pass a checkpoint without paying 10-30 Rubles for a car, or 50 for a lorry.

Threats like land mines, stray bullets and poisoned water sources pose serious risks for the NGO members as well.

When the problems are discussed with intoxicated Russian soldiers, you are likely to face more problems than find solutions. The ICRC members have experienced this closely. In May 2001 at a checkpoint in Grozny, after a row between officers and Russian soldiers guns were drawn and Arbi Israilov, ICRC member was shot on the abdomen.

When your security is ensured by the so called Russian soldiers or the Chechen allies in authority, you have to travel with them. At first sight this might sound safe but brings about a negative likelihood in terms of reaching the NGOs aims.

While there are clues and rumours as to the involvement of these FSB and Russian security people in kidnapping people and ransom claims, thus these aid providers are exposed to dissuasive action in terms of help provision. Thus, they are expected to withdraw and quit.

### **THE ROLE OF NGOs IN INFORMATION GATHERING**

Another benefit of the NGO members' being able to enter Chechnya is that they can gather information by contacting people who have been exposed to mistreatment and get first hand information or having these experiences personally themselves. Ingushetia had been the source of information in the sense that the NGO members could function as sources of information traffic there.

That is why, whether it is humanitarian aid or human right protection, whichever organisation demanded entry to Chechnya was suspected and assumed to be troublesome by Kremlin.

### **KIDNAPPINGS FOR RANSOM**

Beside the ever-present danger of being attacked by unknown assailants, the greatest obstacle the NGO workers in Chechnya are facing while carrying out their humanitarian activities is the possibility of being kidnapped. Of course kidnappings are not only taking place in and around Chechnya. Among all the criminal activities in the Caucasus, Trans-Caucasus and the other regions of the Russian Federation kidnapping has become the most lucrative and popular one since the early 1990s. But for the war offers the criminal bands a more secure and hazard-free conditions in terms of hiding and escaping from punishment by legal authorities, Chechnya has received the greatest attention of the observers of the region.

However the International Organisations' experience of being liable to be working in high-risk situations and having to deal with the risk of kidnapping is not limited to the Caucasus region. For instance, 140 UN personnel were killed and at least 25 incidents of NGO workers being kidnapped were reported between 1992-98. In addition, 50 UN personnel were either arrested or disappeared. In December 1997 a French woman working for UNHCR in Tajikistan was kidnapped and killed during the rescue operation. In February 1997, 4 UNHCR personnel, 12 UN observers and a number of NGO workers and journalists were kidnapped and released later. Between 1994-97 33 people working for UNHCR in the Great Lakes Region of Africa gave their lives to distribute humanitarian aid.

During the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, 8 UNHCR personnel and 4 members of an Italian flight team who were supplying Sarajevo with humanitarian aid by air were killed.<sup>4</sup>

The unpleasant fame of Chechnya for being a haven for kidnapping, we must admit, flourished on the ruins created by the first Russo-Chechen war. This spread of the practice of kidnapping is a consequence of the first war. Therefore, the explosion of kidnapping incidents in Chechnya in 1996 could only be understood in the light of the first war's impact on Chechnya and the Chechen society.

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<sup>4</sup> *"Ogata Condemns Violence Against Aid Workers, Calls for Hostage Release"*, UNHCR Press Releases, 29 Apr 1998

Kidnapping is not a phenomenon invented and carried out only by the Chechens. It is a complex issue. It is impossible for these inhuman, illegal and immoral activities to be carried out without the support of foreign criminal bands, Russian intelligence units, Russian security forces and the police units of the neighbouring republics. In Chechnya there are groups and families infamous for their involvement in kidnapping business. "Yamadaev brothers" are only one example.<sup>5</sup> Even an ordinary Chechen who is aware of what is going on around him in Chechnya knows well that the cooperation with the Russian intelligence units is the secret behind the success of this family in the lucrative business of kidnapping.

The killing in Stariye Atagi of the 4 workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1997 and the same unfortunate and vicious fate of the 4 communication specialists, 3 from the UK and 1 from New Zealand highlighted the depth and the seriousness of the situation. The kidnapping and later killing of the Kenneth Gluck, the director of Médecins Sans Frontières' for Holland, shocked the international humanitarian aid community once again who were still trying to come to terms with the impact of the previous incidents.

### **SECURITY ESCORTS FOR CONVOYS**

Because of the kidnappings of 700 people in the last 10 years, the humanitarian aid organisations became very restricted, quite understandably, in their ability to carry out their activities for the fear of the lives of their members. Therefore they began to hire bodyguards for their own security. However this chance of providing some sort of security for their members was taken away by the decision of the pro-Moscow Chechen administration to provide only the administration's own personnel to escort the humanitarian aid convoys.

These security escorts manned by the Russian or pro-Russian Chechen security officers prevented the humanitarian aid workers from establishing closer dialogue with the local population and disabled them from seeing the real problems the ordinary Chechens faced.

The Russian authorities insist that for security reasons only the Russian security forces or the members of pro-Russian Chechen security forces must escort the aid convoys. However in reality this is creating more problems than solving them. Because upon arrival at a settlement, the locals do not want to leave their houses in fear of a cleansing operation by the security forces. Let us hear the opinion of an aid worker, Mr. Eric Rueman the spokesperson of the ICRC: "Moscow's insistence on army escorts for Red Cross employees was often counter-productive, as the presence of troops made Chechens mistrust the aid workers."<sup>6</sup>

### **NGO REACTION TO KIDNAPPINGS**

The members of humanitarian organisations are making great sacrifices and risking their lives to provide help to those in need under very dangerous conditions and unfortunately these sacrifices usually go unnoticed by the wider public. These workers are kidnapped, tortured and at times are killed. Therefore in response the NGOs ask those in charge to give security guarantees. Sometimes to eliminate the risks involved in their activities they either suspend or completely cease their operations.

The NGOs' Caucasian experiences are quite "rich" in kidnappings and reactions to them! While the international community were still discussing the Nina Davidovich and Arjan Erkel incidents, the news of the kidnappings of two The International Committee of the Red Cross workers appeared. Fortunately they were released later.

### **KIDNAPPED RED CROSS WORKERS**

A Red Cross convoy consisting of three vehicles was stopped between the settlements of Radujnoye and Kerla-Yurt on November 13, 2002 while travelling in the direction of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria by men in balaclavas in a Lada Niva. Of the workers in the convoy, the masked man kidnapped Alexander Panov and Musa Satushev.<sup>7</sup> The kidnapped

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<sup>5</sup> Those who kidnapped Alexander Panov and Musa Satushev on 13 November 2002, International Red Cross Workers in Chechnya, turned out to be Yamadayev Brothers who have a reputation for kidnapping with the collaboration of Russians. One of the spokesman of the Pro-Russian Chechen Government Taus Cabrailov, announced that Sulim Yamadayev is the responsible for the kidnapping.  
Source: "Abducted Red Cross Workers Freed", (in Turkish) Agency Caucasus, 18.11.2002

<sup>6</sup> "Red Cross to Stay in Chechnya Despite Kidnapping of US Aid Worker", Agence France Presse, 9 Feb 2001

<sup>7</sup> "Red Cross Workers Kidnapped", Agency Caucasus, 14.11.2002

were released on November 17 without a ransom.<sup>8</sup> ICRC spokesperson Vincent Lusser said that despite being deeply worried about the security situation they did not plan to suspend their activities.<sup>9</sup>

#### **OTHER KIDNAPPING INSTANCES**

The Equilibre French Help Organization's team is abducted in August 1997 and stayed in abduction for 3 months. A considerable sum of money is paid for their freedom.<sup>10</sup> All organizations decided to pull out of the region with the exception of Red Cross. MSF returned to the region with the start of Russo-Chechen War in year 1999.

#### **THE KIDNAPPING OF VINCENT COCHATEL**

On 29 April 1998, The UNHCR commissar Sadako Ogata was asking during the silent march in Geneva from the UNHCR building to Place des Nations about the fate of Vincent Cochatel, the director of the UNHCR Bureau in Vladikavkaz, who had been kidnapped on 29 January 1998 and had not been heard from since then. Cochatel was there to organise the humanitarian aid projects directed at the refugees and IDPs from Georgia, Chechnya and South Ossetia.

In the march organised by the UNHCR, Ogata said: "In recent years, an increasing number of humanitarian aid workers have been victimized around the world. It is outrageous that aid workers, who help people in need, become deliberate targets of murder, hostage taking, harassment and other forms of violence... I call on all states to ensure the safety of aid workers, both international and local, and to do their utmost to secure the release of those currently in captivity."<sup>11</sup>

#### **KIDNAPPING OF GLUCK**

The American aid worker Kenneth Gluck was kidnapped on 9 January 2001 by unknown gunmen after he had visited Stariye Atagi settlement, which is situated 20 miles away from Grozny.<sup>12</sup>

He was released on 3 February. In the press conference that took place in Moscow after his release he did not reveal any information as to the identity of his kidnappers.<sup>13</sup>

However the speculations were rife that he might have been kidnapped by ex-KGB/FSP. And the statement of the FSB spokesperson Alexander Zdanovich that said he had been rescued as a result of a special operation was not generally received as convincing. Speaking to Novaya Gazeta, Vyacheslav Izmailov, who is widely regarded as someone who is involved in rescuing the kidnapped, claimed that the kidnappings in Chechnya were organised by Russian secret agents and their accomplices inside Chechnya.<sup>14</sup>

The European Commission also paid attention to his kidnapping. While criticizing the authorities for being sluggish in dealing with the bureaucratic obstacles that blocked the works of the international humanitarian organisations, the Commission decided only a month after the kidnapping of Gluck to recommence the aid operations that had been suspended following his kidnapping. In a warning note to the Russian authorities the European Commission said "The situation for aid deliveries needs to be considerably improved."<sup>15</sup>

The reaction of the Red Cross to the kidnapping of Gluck was not to stop its activities. The organisation had already withdrawn a number of its workers from the region following the killings of its workers.

According to Eric Reumann, the Red Cross' team of 55 local Chechens was still working in full capacity to look after the ill and the elderly.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Abducted Red Cross Workers Freed", (in Turkish) Agency Caucasus, 18.11.2002

<sup>9</sup> "Red Cross Kidnapping Highlights Daily Insecurity in Chechnya", Agence France Presse, 4 Nov 2002

<sup>10</sup> "Russia: Gunmen Snatch Dutch Worker", Europe Intelligence Wire, 14 Aug 2002

<sup>11</sup> "Ogata Condemns Violence Against Aid Workers, Calls for Hostage Release", UNHCR Press Releases, 29 Apr 1998

<sup>12</sup> "American Aid Worker Kidnapped in Chechnya", Associated Press, 11 Jan 2001

<sup>13</sup> "Freed US Aid Worker Leaves Russia for Home", Agence France Presse, 9 Feb 2001; UN, European Commission Resume Aid to Chechnya, The Associated Press, 20 Feb 2001,

<sup>14</sup> "Freed US Aid Worker Contradicts Kremlin about his Release", AFP, 8 Feb 2001,

<sup>15</sup> "UN, European Commission Resume Aid to Chechnya", The Associated Press, 20 Feb 2001,

<sup>16</sup> "Red Cross to Stay in Chechnya Despite Kidnapping of US Aid Worker", Agence France Presse, 9 Feb 2001

On the other hand, Poul Nielso, the EU Aid Commissar, was extremely outraged by the kidnapping of Gluck, who was working for the Médecins Sans Frontières whose activities were financed by the EU's aid organisation ECHO. He said: "I strongly condemn this kidnapping. It is unacceptable that humanitarian organisations are not able to freely carry out their work assisting those in need. There is a clear need to improve security and access for U.N. agencies and non-governmental organisations working in Chechnya."<sup>17</sup>

Despite the risks involved, the international humanitarian organisations were still operating in the region. After Gluck's release the first the UN then the EU restarted their activities in Chechnya. For instance, a UNHCR aid convoy left on 15 February 2001 for Chechnya.<sup>18</sup>

ECHO, the EU's aid organisation, also began on 22 February its operations that had been carried out by institutions like Danish Council.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, another aid convoy of 25 vehicle organised by MSF, UNHCR and the Danish Council reached Nazran, the capital of Ingushetia, on 5 April 2001.<sup>20</sup>

### **SECURITY GUARANTEE FROM NORTH OSSETIA-ALANIA**

Having faced with the same bureaucratic problems time and again, the UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA representatives called for a meeting with the state authorities in North Ossetia. The meeting took place in Vladikavkaz on 9 April 2001. The agenda on the table was the security guarantees wanted for the workers of aid organisations operating in whole of the Northern Caucasus.

According to the Secretary of the Ossetian National Security Council Yuri Bazayev, who was representing the Ossetian government in the meeting, the number of kidnapping incidents had dropped dramatically since 1999. 99 kidnapping incidents were reported in 1999. Then 38 in 2000 and in the first four months of 2001 no case of kidnapping was recorded.

The representatives of the aid organisations suggested that a single communication network for the whole Northern Caucasus region is established. The Ossetian representatives promised to increase the security measures for aid convoys.<sup>21</sup>

Following this meeting, the UN and the Red Cross representatives in the region met on 25 April 2002 Victor Komogorov, the deputy head of FSB, and Victor Kalamonov, the Russian President's Special Envoy for Human Rights, where the topic of security of aid convoys was once again discussed.<sup>22</sup>

### **THE ARBI ISRAILOV CASE**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) worker Arbi Israilov was shot through his stomach following an argument with the security men on a check point in Grozny on 29 May 2001. Because of this event, the movement of the members ICRC, which supply water and food for 70 thousand people was restricted. After the organisation conducted lengthy security discussions with the Russian authorities, it decided to restart the aid campaign on 27 June 2001.<sup>23</sup>

### **THE ABDUCTION OF DAVIDOVICH**

Nina Davidovich who was a member of NGO named Druzba which is operating with UNICEF and based in Ingushetia. She was abducted on 23 July 2002. According to the head of the Russian supported Chechen administration Ahmet Kadirov, Davidovich had put herself into the risk by not registering with the government.

**THE REACTION OF UN:** After the abduction of Nina Davidovich, the aid operations in Chechnya were suspended for good while the aid operations in Ingushetia was stopped for two days on 29 July 2002. This meant a warning for the Russian and Chechen authorities. The representative of UN humanitarian aids in Moscow, Viktoria Zotikova clarified the action of UN and said: "This was a difficult decision to make, since it will affect the population of

<sup>17</sup> "EU Suspends Humanitarian Aid Activity in Chechnya", Xinhua News Agency, 15 Jan 2001

<sup>18</sup> "Chechnya: Commission Resumes Deliveries of Humanitarian Aid", Europe Intelligence Wire, 23.2.2001

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> "Humanitarian Agencies not to Cut Aid to Chechnya", ITAR-TASS, 05 May 2001

<sup>21</sup> "World Humanitarian Organizations Plan to Move back to Chechnya", ITAR-TASS, 09.04.2001

<sup>22</sup> "Session to Discuss Humanitarian Missions Safety in N. Caucasus", ITAR-TASS, 25 April 2001

<sup>23</sup> "ICRC Resumes Full Operations in Chechnya", Agence France Presse, 27 June 2001

Chechnya. But we made such a decision because the safety of our workers is our top concern."<sup>24</sup>

The only exception where the aid operations were not stopped was the water distribution project in Grozny. Zotikova added that as soon as the Davidovich was freed the aid operations would resume. But the UN restarted the aid operations after a 6 week suspension without further waiting for the release of Davidovich, because there had started a scarcity of basic needs. As UN resumed the aid operations it called Russia for the release of Davidovich and Dutch Arjan Erkel who was a member of MSF and had been abducted in Dagestan a month ago.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is taking greater risks in Caucasus. The Committee is operating with its 11 members in Dagestan. Although Committee became anxious after the abduction of Nina Davidovich and restricted its operations, it did not completely suspend them. The representative of the ICRC Dimitry Polikanov said that Committee was familiar with these kinds of threats and reminded the death of 6 Red Cross workers in a hospital in Chechnya in December 1996.<sup>26</sup> The Danish Refugee Council is another important UN aid organisation which, like UN, showed a strong reaction to the abduction of Davidovich.

UN resumed its operations in Ingushetia on 31 July 2002. UN had suspended its operations in Northern Caucasus on 29 July 2002 as result of the abduction of Nina Davidovich.<sup>27</sup>

### **THE ABDUCTION OF ARJAN ERKEL**

The abduction of the regional representative of Médecins Sans Frontières Arjan Erkel, in one of the side streets of the capital of Dagestan on 12 August 2002 by three masked men of whom two had been armed, caused a big sensation in NGO world.<sup>28</sup>

The MSF suspended its activities in Northern Caucasus on 12 August as a reaction to the abduction of Arjan Erkel. The organisation resumed its activities in Ingushetia on 10 September 2002.<sup>29</sup> This abduction, just following the abduction of Nina Davidovich pushed once more the safety concerns of NGOs to the top.

On the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the abduction, MSF announced that neither them nor the family of Erkel had no news from him and they were concerned about Erkel's safety.<sup>30</sup>

### **THE ATTEMPT TO DISSUADE THE NGOS ENTERING CHECHNYA**

The organisations that are afraid to enter Chechnya are further discouraged by the faked news. The best example of this case is the Russian military based news given by Interfax which alleged that on 7 March 2001 an aid convoy of four vehicles had been attacked by the Chechen fighters.

This news was enough to unnerve the aid organisations which had just decided to re-enter the region following the release of Gluck on 4 February 2001 who had been abducted on 9 January 2001. But the UNRHC representative in Moscow, the World Food Program, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Action Against Hunger, the Danish Refugee Council, all stated that their convoys were not attacked in Chechnya.<sup>31</sup>

The Russian authorities sometimes blame the NGOs for "helping the Chechen rebels" and try to restrict their operations. For example, the Russian Federal Security Service has accused the Danish Refugee Council of giving food aid to the men of Aslan Maskhadov.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "UN Suspends Chechnya Aid", The Associated Press, 29 Jul 2002

<sup>25</sup> "UN resumes its Work in Chechnya after Six-Week Suspension", The Associated Press, 9.9.2002

<sup>26</sup> "Aid Agencies Fret over Caucasus Staff", Europe Intelligence Wire, 15 Aug 2002 (BBC Monitoring Service)

<sup>27</sup> "Chechnya: UN Representatives Resume Work in Ingushetia", Europe Intelligence Wire, 30 Jul 2002

<sup>28</sup> "Medical Aid Group 'Deeply Concerned' about Abducted Employee", AFP, 20 November 2002

<sup>29</sup> "Aid Group Resumes Work in Russia", The Associated Press, 10 Sep 2002

<sup>30</sup> "Medical aid Group 'Deeply Concerned' about Abducted Employee", AFP, 20 November 2002

<sup>31</sup> "Chechen Rebels Deny Report of Attacking Aid Convoy", AFP, March 8, 2001

<sup>32</sup> "Russian Security Forces Accuse Danish NGO of Aiding Chechen Rebels", ITAR-TASS 1 December 2001

## **THE SITUATION IN GEORGIA**

The Pankisi Valley in Georgia is another place where the Chechen refugees live and the aid operations are often interrupted. The valley which has a dense refugee population since 1999 was bombed by the Russian planes a few times and as a result, the aid operations were suspended.

Such events took place in 2002. The UNHCR representative Ron Redmond announced that UNHCR had to suspend its plans to send aid to the Pankisi Valley because of safety problems and increased crime rates.<sup>33</sup> UNHCR managed to send aid to the valley on December 2001. UNHCR's aid for January 2002 was for two months. As the safety problems increased in Akhmeta region the Georgian authorities setup a control unit there.

UNHCR closed its Akhmeta aid office on August 2002 and suspended its operations in Pankisi where, according to the official records of UNHCR 3680 refugees lived.<sup>34</sup> While UN claimed that the reason for the closure of the office was safety, the Georgian authorities disagreed. The Georgia Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili said that they saw no tangible reason for closing the UN Akhmeta office.<sup>35</sup>

The number of refugees who started to come the valley since 1999 was about 7,000 on February 2002 when the rumors were high for the incoming Russian attack. On the other hand, as many Chechens live with their ethnical relatives, the Kists, it is very difficult to trace the accurate number of refugees. According to the records of UNRHC there were 7601 refugee Chechens in the valley on 31 December 2002.<sup>36</sup>

The census taken under the sponsorship of UN on May 2002 has showed the recorded number of the refugees as 3680.<sup>37</sup> The main cause of this decline in the number of the refugees was the rumor that the Georgian security forces with the collaboration of USA were about to launch an attack on the valley because of increased crime rate. UNHCR restarted its aid operations on 16 August 2002.<sup>38</sup>

## **ABKHAZIA: A VERY SPECIAL CASE**

The case of Abkhazia, one of the republics in the North Caucasus, which is under all kinds of economical, communicational and transportation embargos imposed on 30 October 1995 by the Commonwealth of Independent States led by Russia, is of course very different from those other hot conflict areas like Chechnya.

The international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Médecins Sans Frontières are running a number of programmes in Abkhazia in order to erase the negative effects of the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993 as well as to carry out some rehabilitation projects there.

Although Abkhazia is unable to contact with the outside world due to the imposed embargos, still she is more fortunate as she has natural resources which are almost sufficient for its economic life. Abkhazia believes that she will be no more in need of such aids of these humanitarian organisations to that much degree whenever the economics embargos are lifted.

But, in this present situation, Abkhazia has several problems which she can not handle with her own sources: Health and education are those which have most vital importance. Besides, the mines left from the war are one of the most serious threats. According to the Abkhaz sources, nearly 35.000 mines are existing in 500 different areas of the republic. There are certain works done by HALO Trust Company, but they are still insufficient.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Georgia: Forced Suspension of Aid Deliveries into Pankisi Valley", 18 Jan 2002, UNHCR News Stories

<sup>34</sup> "Georgia/Chechnya: UNHCR Temporarily Suspends Aid Activities", 2 Aug 2002, (Quoted from the press conference statements of the UNHCR Spokesperson Ron Redmond in Geneva), UNHCR News Stories

<sup>35</sup> "Georgian officials See No Reason for Closure of UN Office in Pankisi", 06 August 2002, Interfax News Agency, Moscow, (in English)

<sup>36</sup> "Fehim Ta'atekin, A Tiny Valley of Great Storm: Pankisi", Caucasus Foundation Reports 3 (in Turkish), [www.kafkas.org.tr/hakkinda/pankisi.html](http://www.kafkas.org.tr/hakkinda/pankisi.html)

<sup>37</sup> "Census Surprise in Pankisi", (in Turkish) Agency Caucasus, 01.06.2002

<sup>38</sup> "Georgia: Pankisi Gorge Aid to Resume", 16 Aug 2002, Quoted from the press conference statements of the UNHCR Spokesman Kris Janowski

<sup>39</sup> "Initial Report on the Landmine Situation in Abkhazia", Centre for Humanitarian Programmes Sukhum, Abkhazia, September 1998

Therefore Abkhazia has great concerns and sensitivity for the security conditions of the humanitarian organisations.

As far as the criminal activities are concerned, Abkhazia is more peaceful and stable than Georgia, which she had given independence struggle against it.

The common belief in Abkhazia is that: Some external forces those who have very much desire to deprive the Abkhaz people of the aids by driving these humanitarian organisations away, should be looked for behind the likely attacks on these organisations.

For Instance, when the office of Médecins Sans Frontières, which was serving medical aid programme to fight against tuberculosis in Abkhazia, was attacked on 24 December 2002, the reaction of the Abkhaz authorities was very stiff.

Those who attacked the office of the organisation in the capital city Sukhum, not only did they run away getting the money amount of 3,000 USD and 1,500 Rubles after hogtying the workers by use of force, but they also took away the computer with them which had all the crucial data about the programme of the struggle against tuberculosis inside it.<sup>40</sup>

This event has naturally brought about the question of whether the organisation will leave Abkhazia or not. This question was of much vital importance from one aspect, because the costs of the programme which was being run by the organisation for the sake of people of Abkhazia was so much that this small republic would surely have great difficulty in realizing it.

Because of that, directly the deputy minister for internal affairs Valeriy Lagvilava himself was assigned as the head of the investigation team for this event.

Erik Kont, who is head of mission for the organisation in Abkhazia, was saying that "If the Abkhaz authorities could not guarantee our security here, we would be forced to stop our programmes and leave Abkhazia soon. During the years we had worked here, we have built very good relations with the local people and the official authorities of Abkhazia."<sup>41</sup>

In fact, even during the times when the humanitarian works were discontinued in other parts of the North Caucasus due to the security problems, those programs have never been suspended in Abkhazia.

Abkhazia is now waiting for a high ranking representative from the organisation's headquarter in Paris in January 2003. They are going to meet and scrutinize carefully what those guaranties of security would be.

Then, what does MSF really mean for Abkhazia? MSF carries out various projects on the fields of medical aid in Abkhazia for 10 years.

Whenever the MSF stops its aid programs in Abkhazia, 8.000 people would be deprived of the chance of the medical aid, free consultation and surgical services.

Moreover, the medicine and vehicle supports for 20 medical centres would be stopped and the medical treatment of 250 persons would be interrupted. Experts are warning that this circumstance might cause to the tuberculosis invasion in Abkhazia. Furthermore, 50 Abkhazians who had been employed by MSF would be out of their works.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly, the Abkhaz authorities have the right to show their deep concerns in front of this fact.

What is really overlooked, while studying the humanitarian aids, are the still insisting unjust practices of the humanitarian and other international organisations who supply them financial supports like UN and EU by more concentrating in their aid programmes on Georgia, although it was Abkhazia who was the side that was attacked in the war of 1992-1993 and really in need of aid because of the great sufferings owing to the destructive effects of continuing embargo since 1995.

In one of his valuable works dealing with the developments that took place after the war between Abkhazia and Georgia, SOAS professor George Hewitt exposes this unjust contrast

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<sup>40</sup> *Attack against the Médecins Sans Frontières, (in Turkish) Agency Caucasus, 31.12.2002*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> These figures are collected by the Apsnypress, official news agency of Abkhazia. Source: *"Attack against the Médecins Sans Frontières, (in Turkish) Agency Caucasus, 31.12.2002*

very clearly. Hewitt quotes these following statements of Butros Ghali from his report dated January 1996:

"Emergency relief and humanitarian aid currently remain the principal focus of United Nations assistance and other donors' support to Georgia....The World Bank assists Georgia in restoring macroeconomic stability, improving living standards, strengthening public institutions in the financial sector and enhancing economic management. The International Monetary Fund is providing technical assistance covering fiscal areas (tax and customs, treasury operations and fiscal management) and monetary fields (central banking) in support of the recently introduced national currency, the lari."<sup>43</sup>

This unilateral support became stronger by the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement signed by EU in Luxembourg on 22 April 1996.

Hewitt comments on Ghali's report by these words:

"Not one word about Abkhazia in all of this, and, of course, no assistance whatsoever has been sent to the Abkhazian authorities despite the fact that their province was the one deliberately targeted, ravaged and ruined by the Shevardnadze regime - a certain amount of humanitarian relief, particularly after the heavy floods in the late spring of 1995, received from Russia is the significant exception. Add to this the blockade instituted by Russia from the end of the war and subsequently tightened by the closure of the port of Sukhum (cutting the lifeline to Trabzon). At the same time the attitude of Western ministries and the UN is that responsibility for returning and then safeguarding tens of thousands of refugees to an area whose infrastructure has been shattered rests solely on the Abkhazian authorities - the non-refugee residents of Abkhazia evidently count for nought. No relief whatsoever for Abkhazia in terms of rebuilding, mine-clearance, medical (including psychological) aid, restocking looted cultural and educational facilities, etc... has even been considered, let alone offered. As Dodge Billingsley stated in an earlier quote, the (successive) Georgian authorities are responsible in the main for the misery that has befallen Georgia since the collapse of the USSR. Georgia should certainly not be left to sink, but it cannot be just to channel all aid solely to the central authority in a fragmented republic when that central authority has deliberately caused an utter catastrophe (and indeed periodically threatens to repeat the exercise) in an area it claims as its own but over which, thanks to its own political incompetence that manifestly continues to enjoy approval in the West, it has lost de facto control. If humanitarian aid means what it says, it should be sent wherever it is needed - that the West denies its resources to those who did all they could to avoid resorting to arms but who were left with no option other than to defend themselves against the miscalculations of their opponents' destructive leadership and who suffer the terrible consequences while at the same time doing all in its power to buttress those who caused this suffering is indefensible."<sup>44</sup>

Below are the remarks on the present situation of Abkhazia in a report dated 21 January 2000 and prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which carries out several activities in Abkhazia and Georgia aiming to rebuild relations between two peoples after it realized a trip to the region.

"The economic and social situation in Abkhazia is very difficult, and is worsened by the embargo imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States. Approximately two thirds of the pre-conflict population has left. The population is reliant on international humanitarian aid."

"Thirdly, the blindness of the international community, which had relied on the convenient principle of national sovereignty and territorial integrity in order to side unhesitatingly with Georgia: the Abkhaz victory over the Georgian aggressor, which had been a case of legitimate self-defence and had been secured by arms at the cost of enormous human sacrifices, had been punished by the international community, wrongly and without any legal basis, by international condemnation of the whole of Abkhazia, together with further punitive measures which were a de facto violation especially of the elementary rights of the poorest Abkhazians (for example, many vital medicines had become prohibitively expensive as they were only available by means of contraband). Instead of sacrificing human rights on the altar of *raison d'état* by maintaining collective sanctions which were harmful to the rights of the

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<sup>43</sup> *"Post-war Developments in the Georgian-Abkhazian Dispute"*, George Hewitt, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, June 1996, ISBN 1 901053 01 6

<sup>44</sup> *"Post-war Developments in the Georgian-Abkhazian Dispute"*, George Hewitt

poorest and weakest, the international community should legally recognise the de facto independence of Abkhazia and help it to ensure that its citizens were granted minimum rights in the economic and social sphere as well as in the political sphere."<sup>45</sup>

Certainly, the negative reflections of the international community's preference to help only Georgia and the continuing embargo in Abkhazia are not only limited with the NGO's activities. The embargo also condemns the relations between the Abkhaz diaspora with their motherland to a minimum level, who are reportedly 5 times bigger than the Abkhazia's population. Supposedly if a natural disaster happens in Abkhazia, there is no chance for nearly 400.000 Abkhaz diaspora community who live in Turkey to convey their humanitarian aids to their relatives there. As the Abkhazian diaspora community are deprived of helping their relatives because of the embargo, at the same time the investment opportunities in Abkhazia have been also blocked.

#### **INDEPENDENT ORGANISATIONS AND THE NEGATIVE RESULTS OF SEPTEMBER 11**

The humanitarian aids do not, of course, consist of works financed by UN and USA. There are many aid works conducted by the independent organisations and special aid committees setup at crisis regions.

As an example, the refugees who are staying in the camps of Fenerbahçe, Ümraniye and Beykoz in Istanbul, could live only on the personal supports of the few charitable individuals. *Chechen Refugees Question*", Chechen Refugees Report of the Caucasus Foundation, Fehim Tastekin. (OCTOBER 2001)

But, after the attacks aimed at the American twin towers and Pentagon, on 11 September 2001, Russia has started campaigns against the aid organisations which are not related to UN and USA

The efforts of Russia to link the independent aid organisations with el-Kaide has unsettled and dissuaded many aid organisations. These organisations begun to give up their functions because of the fear of being labeled as an el-Kaide related organisation

Undoubtedly, thousands of refugees living in foreign countries (except Ingushetia, Georgia and partly Azerbaijan), can not get international aid because they are not accepted and identified as "refugees". These people survive only by the help of regional and independent aid organisations and philanthropic people.

Russia may strive to break up the solidarity between people by accusing them of "International terrorism" in order to make "life unbearable for Chechens everywhere and make them bow".

But this behaviour only helps to increase the tragedy of humanity and it nothing good comes out of it.

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<sup>45</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (DP/2000/CRP.2) 21 January 2000, *MISSION REPORT*, <http://www.undp.org/execbrd/word/00crp2e.doc>

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