

## **Chechnya: Russian crimes and world's silence**

By Prof Khurshid Ahmad 601-0-A

THE UN Human Rights Commission had passed a resolution in the last week of April calling on the Russian government to set up an independent inquiry into accusations of the violations of rights in Chechnya. The Commission was "gravely concerned by the continued violence in Chechnya and reports indicating disproportionate and indiscriminate use of Russian military force, including attacks against civilians which has led to a serious humanitarian situation."

In view of the unabated brutal use of force by Russia, this resolution of the UN Commission is like shedding crocodile tears. Moreover, it is unfortunate that it took some half a year for the international community to adopt such a resolution. It is really a belated effort and thus has already lost much of its significance. One wonders as to what really stops the UN and western powers from taking effective and timely action.

The weakness and the self-serving approach of the world community and the Muslim leadership, particularly the OIC, its executive and its current head, Iran, is a blunder that history would never forgive. Similarly, the silence of the UN and its secretary-general, who has the honor of belonging to the Third World, would serve to erode whatever is left there of the oppressed people's trust in the international organizations.

Eric Margolis of the Toronto Sun is right in saying that:

"Those who observe a monstrous crime and do nothing should feel guilt for it. We begin the 21st century watching silently as a brutish Russia, which knows neither shame nor mercy crushes the life out of a tiny but heroic people who refuse to bend their knees to Moscow's tyranny."

Russia and its leadership have committed at least five heinous crimes and should be held accountable for each of these. It deserves the punishment of war crimes just like those of Nazi Germany of the past and Yugoslavia of today.

The first crime is the armed invasion of an independent state. Russia has given two lame excuses. The first is that at the instigation of Chechnya, an 'Islamic state' was established in two towns of Dagestan. The second excuse was that Chechens exploded mobs in a Moscow area and killed 200 people. Not only that Chechen government or its people had nothing to do with these explosions, later facts have established that none but Russian secret service was involved in placing the bombs in two cases so that this may be used as a pretext to invade Chechnya.

The second crime was the despicable attempt at genocide, at devastating the entire area and wiping out the whole of population. In fact, this is part of the criminal repression the Russian leadership has been committing since the 16th century. In 1944, by forcing exodus on Chechen and Tatar nations, in which 1.5 million people succumbed to hardships and misery, Stalin tried to eliminate a generation. In 1994-96, more than 100,000 people were massacred. In September last year, Russia launched an attack on Chechnya with the latest weaponry with 125 to 200 daily air strikes, each with 15 to 45 warplanes.

The latest M-16 planes and M-1 gunship helicopters were employed in these strikes. Long-range artillery was used day and night. Cluster bombs, napalm bombs, chemical bombs and even toy bombs were used against the population. All big cities, including Grozny, Godasmir and Shali, were completely destroyed. Thus, a country of 1.2 million population and 13,000 sq. km. of area presents a picture of a ruin. More than 300,000 people have migrated and are living a very miserable life while the remaining have become homeless in their own country.

Ruthless use of force and extent of destruction along with the war crimes provide sufficient basis for holding the Russians guilty of crimes against humanity. Talking to the US Senators, Russian scientist Andre Sakharov's widow, Elena Bonner, has said:

"Russia's war against Chechnya is a dastardly criminal act against humanity. For political benefit, Putin has waged this unjust war. Lack of strong action by the world has encouraged Russia to continue its bloody war in Chechnya."

Video films of Turk and German war correspondents and observers of the US Human Rights Group and Amnesty International prove that Russians are guilty of committing dreadful crimes of genocide, torture, concentration camps. While Russia has been committing the crimes, the US and the western nations have fully helped it in continuing its bloody game. This suggests that they are all accomplices. America and the European community countries hold that Chechnya is Russia's internal issue. Clinton and Albright said they supported Russian efforts against terrorism. Besides, America and Germany extended full financial assistance and technical support to Russia and mass killings of innocent and helpless men, women and children who were fleeing the war-hit areas.

Russia's third crime is that it committed war and genocide merely for personal political stains. Luke Delahaye of Newsweek has thus summed up his experience of ten years: - "Ten years after the beginning of reform, injustice is installed as a system. It would be simplistic to talk only about an economic disaster confronting the people we met. The land is one of violence, abandoned children, tuberculosis, drug addiction, prostitution, homelessness and, of course- now more than ever alcoholism is what Russia now faces, and what I have photographed is a deep social, moral and cultural crisis."

It was clear that Yeltsin and his cohorts had failed and that he could not win the forthcoming presidential elections. Vladimir Putin, a confidant of Yeltsin and KGB's former head, was made prime minister and designated a presidential candidate and acting president, in quite a dramatic move. In one of his interviews, Putin has thus described himself: "I was a hooligan, not a pioneer. Seriously, I was a real ruffian." (The Times, March 17, 2000).

Russia's fourth crime is that its war is of greed and plunder of resources just like different nations of Europe had done as colonial powers during the last 500 years. The reasons that account for Chechnya's importance include its agricultural potential, mineral and energy resources and its geographic centrality. It provides key access to Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Central Asia and Caspian Sea. The pipeline for the supply of Azeri oil would go through Chechnya. Similarly, Kazak pipeline goes through Chechnya to Russia. To control these resources and to keep these areas under its influence, Russia wants to dominate Chechnya.

The fifth in the list of Russian crimes is its hostility towards Islam. Islamic revivalist movements are a major target of Russian propaganda. These are being defamed as 'Wahhabism.' Derogatory remarks are used against Afghan jihad. Osama bin Laden's specter is haunting them. Sufi Islam is emphasized (though the fact is that Naqshbandi and other Sufi schools have been in the vanguard of struggle against Russia). The question is how can Russia or any other country force people not to live life according to their own beliefs and ideals and rather accept the ways of Russia or any other hegemony.

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The IMF and the western countries provided billions of dollars to Russia, which enabled it to manage its defense budget. In July 1999, the IMF extended \$ 6.2 billion and the invasion on Chechnya started just within six months. Recently, the IMF has pledged to provide an additional \$3 billion. Clinton connived at Putin's crimes and rather applauded him. The US Security Advisor Sandy Berger was audacious and shameless enough to say, "The United States is not considering ending of economic assistance in protest against Moscow's policy towards Chechnya...

Cutting it off would only be against our interests. (Dec. 20, 1999).

The basic reason for this is the fact that America and Russia have no difference in respect of their interests. Lain Levin, Amnesty International's representative, quite clearly said that the 15-member UN Security Council would not take the initiative on Chechnya because two of the Big Five the United States and Russia have struck a deal.

Russian crimes in Chechnya were possible only with the silent and all-out support of America and the western nations. Eric Margolis has rightly said, "The Clinton administration, which is largely financing Russia's genocide in Chechnya, supplied Russia attack helicopters with advanced US night-vision devices 'to combat terrorism.' Bill Clinton recently called for 'liberation' of Grozny by Russia. Yet he cannot understand why so many Muslims see America as their enemy."

In view of these facts, it is obvious that the resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission is an attempt to cover up the complicity of the so-called international community in general and western powers and the US in particular in Russian crimes in Chechnya. In fact, this is yet another evidence of the West's dual policy and discrimination against Muslims. On the other hand, the brave struggle of the Chechens has not only exposed the vicious collusion of Russia and western regimes but also the weaknesses and lack of political grit and insight on the part of the leadership in Muslim countries. The struggle has also established the fact, once again, that a nation that endears independence and is prepared to pay for it can never be subjugated.

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