Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1499 (2001)[1]

Humanitarian situation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Chechnya

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly refers to its Recommendation 1498 (2001).

2. The Assembly stresses the importance of humanitarian aspects of the conflict in Chechnya, which in no case should be overshadowed by political questions. In particular, the Assembly notes with concern that the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region remains very precarious. Approximately 178 000 IDPs from Chechnya are staying in Ingushetia and further 100 000 are accommodated in other neighbouring regions.

3. Although some progress can be observed in the fields of basic education of displaced children and medical care, the overall situation is unsatisfactory. There is a dramatic shortage of medicines, winter clothing and footwear, milk products for children, hygiene products and sanitation facilities. A number of displaced people still live in railway carriages in appalling and unacceptable conditions.

4. The Assembly notes that, according to the authorities, by mid-December all IDP camps in Ingushetia and Chechnya will have been provided with heating and gas, and that by April 2001 all people accommodated in trains will be transferred to public buildings.

5. Relatively little international assistance is focused on Chechnya as compared to Ingushetia. The recent decision by the United Nations Designated Official for Security in the Russian Federation to suspend its aid operation in Chechnya following the kidnapping of a Médecins sans frontières staff member will make the humanitarian situation deteriorate further. The Russian authorities should ensure the security of humanitarian staff and remove artificial bureaucratic obstacles which may hamper the humanitarian action in the Chechen territory.

6. The Assembly encourages the international humanitarian agencies to increase their presence in Chechnya and to co-operate, whenever possible, with local humanitarian organisations.

7. It is necessary to create the conditions for the return of refugees in security and dignity through the re-establishment of the socio-economic infrastructure and the donation of financial and material support for those wishing to return and reconstruct their houses.

8. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

8.1. urge the Russian authorities:

– with regard to humanitarian assistance:

a. to ensure that the recent restructuring of the federal administration and transfer of competence regarding internally displaced persons (IDP) camps will not influence the efficiency of humanitarian assistance;

1. Assembly debate on 25 January 2001 (7th Sitting) (see Doc. 8944, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, rapporteur: Mr Iwiński). Text adopted by the Assembly on 25 January 2001 (7th Sitting).

b. to minimise bureaucratic obstacles which may have a considerable impact on the quality of humanitarian assistance, and in particular to simplify regulations concerning access for humanitarian agencies to the Chechen Republic;

c. to guarantee the safety of staff working in these agencies;

d. to allow radio communications using non-licensed frequencies in the field;

e. to lift, without any delay, VAT in any form, on all humanitarian goods irrespective of their origin;

f. to reduce considerably the number of checkpoints on the Chechen territory, and combat in more effective way the bribery at checkpoints and borders with neighbouring republics;

g. to make sure that the introduction of visas between the Russian Federation and Georgia will not affect the freedom of movement between Chechnya and Georgia;

h. to improve the management of relief aid in order to re-target it from Ingushetia to Chechnya;

i. to transfer, by no later than April 2001, all IDPs accommodated in trains to public buildings;

j. to improve the quality of food distributed among IDPs, and, in particular, as a matter of urgency, to provide at least children with milk products and vegetables;

k. to provide IDP camps with adequate medicines and to ensure that these people have free access to specialised medical services, which is not the case at present;

l. to distribute toiletries bearing in mind that extremely poor conditions of hygiene may have disastrous consequences for health;

m. to provide IDPs with more mattresses, sheets, blankets, clothing and footwear;

n. to allow registered Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia to collect their pensions on the spot without having to go to Chechnya;

o. to channel humanitarian relief to host families accommodating IDPs;

– with regard to future reconstruction and repatriation:

a. to set up a legal basis for compensation for lost property;

b. to consider joining the Council of Europe Development Bank with a view to benefiting from the financial opportunities offered by it for the reconstruction of Chechnya;

c. to elaborate and implement a long-term reconstruction plan for Chechnya, and in particular for Grozny, in co-operation with relevant finance institutions and international organisations;

d. to assure the accountability of war criminals, whose persecution is one of the preconditions for the return of refugees and IDPs in safety and security.

8.2. call on the international community:

a. to increase the international presence in Chechnya;

b. to rely, whenever possible, on local humanitarian agencies;

c. to co-operate with the local Chechen administration;

d. to step up assistance to IDPs in the Chechen Republic;

e. to provide IDPs with day-to-day necessities and food for children as well as medicines;

f. to contribute to the elaboration of a long-term reconstruction plan for Chechnya;

g. to step up financial aid;

8.3. call on the United Nations Designated Official for Security in the Russian Federation to review its decision on the suspension of its aid operation in Chechnya;

8.4. call on the Council of Europe Development Bank to examine ways in which it could contribute to a long-term reconstruction plan for Chechnya

8.5. call on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to examine the possibilities of supporting Chechen refugees and displaced persons through partnership between European towns and the municipalities in the northern Caucasus hosting refugees and IDPs, along the lines elaborated during the Kosovo crisis.