



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on Conditions for Displaced Persons from Chechnya

As delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative Douglas Davidson  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 25, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is particularly concerned about a number of aspects of the conflict in Chechnya, including continued reports of human rights abuses. Today we would like to draw attention to the humanitarian situation for internally displaced persons in the North Caucasus.

While many reputable NGO's functioning in the region are providing reports on their monitoring and observation activities, and while they corroborate what is now a dire situation, we would like in particular to call attention to the report issued on February 9 report by Ms. Panfilova, President Putin's own representative on the humanitarian situation in the North Caucasus. That report is entitled "On the Results of the Mission of the Commission on Human Rights under the President of the Russian Federation to Chechnya and Ingushetia."

This report focuses on two principal problems preventing the return of IDPs to Chechnya from the temporary camps in which they are currently residing in Ingushetia. The first is the dangerous security situation and the lack of housing in Chechnya. The second is the lack of economic prospects in Chechnya itself.

The report also cites inefficiency and corruption in the administration of compensation being offered to those who decide to return to Chechnya, including the considerable bribes that returnees often must pay in order to avoid retribution from Chechen authorities.

Here, if you'll permit me, we would like to quote for the Council the conclusion of this report: "It is premature to invite the IDPs back to the Chechen Republic. This attempt has no real economic, social and legal basis."

Mr. Chairman, bearing in mind these facts put forward in the report, and the report's own conclusion, the United States urges Russian federal and local authorities to support voluntary returns to Chechnya and to provide alternative shelter for IDPs who wish to remain in Ingushetia. Under international norms, the return of IDPs is considered

voluntary only when they are offered acceptable alternative shelter in Ingushetia for those who wish to stay.

We ask Russian authorities not to close tent camps and spontaneous settlements and to cease deregistering IDPs who wish to stay in Ingushetia. We also urge Russian authorities to stop cutting utilities to camps and settlements.

A stable security environment in Chechnya is a prerequisite for IDP returns as well as for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We consider the access of humanitarian organizations' to radio communications (HF, VHF frequencies) and satellite telephones as essential to improve the security of humanitarian operations in Chechnya. We urge Russian authorities to allow these organizations access to these essential tools of communication.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, a safe environment resulting from ample security for humanitarian organizations delivering aid is essential for better identification of needs and closer monitoring and evaluation of relief operations and their beneficiaries. We urge Russian federal and local authorities to work constructively and cooperatively with international assistance organizations. These organizations have taken great risks to try to provide for the basic needs of many thousands of people. If Chechnya is to be someday considered "normal" again, respect for these international norms, and cooperation with international organizations and NGOs willing to offer a helping hand will surely be tests that need to be met.

I thank you.