



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took offic This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



U.S. Department of State

Russia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1997.

RUSSIA

Russia continued its profound political, economic, and social transformation. Democratic institutions and practices are evolving but are not fully developed. The Constitution approved by voters in 1993 provides for a democratic government comprised of three branches with checks and balances. The executive branch consists of an elected president as its leader and a government headed by a prime minister. There is a bicameral legislature (Federal Assembly), consisting of the State Duma and the Federation Council, and a judicial branch. For the first time in Russia's history as an independent state, its head of state was chosen in a competitive election. It was judged largely free and fair. The judiciary showed signs of limited independence.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Procuracy, and the Federal Tax Police are responsible for law enforcement at all levels of government throughout the Russian Federation; the MVD also oversees most of the prison system. In addition to its core responsibilities of security, counterintelligence, and counterterrorism, the FSB has broad law enforcement functions, including fighting crime and corruption. The FSB operates with only limited oversight by the procuracy and the courts. The military participated in the conflict in Chechnya and is occasionally used for riot control. Some members of the security forces continued to commit human rights abuses.

For the past 5 years, Russia has been in the process of transition from a centrally planned to a market economy. Real gross domestic product had fallen 34 percent from the 1991 level by the end of 1995. The transformation has affected nearly every sector of the economy as labor resources shift from the

former Soviet Union's emphasis on industrial output to a greater balance among production, trade, and services. Industrial output has shrunk from being over 75 percent of the country's economic activity in the 1980's to less than 40 percent in 1996. The energy and raw material sectors account for most of industrial output and constitute the majority of exports. Organized crime is active in many sectors of the economy. Per capita income is \$3,400. A sharp reduction in inflation and stabilization of the exchange rate led incomes to grow significantly for the first time since the beginning of the transition. Income disparities have increased dramatically since the downfall of communism, and about 23 percent of the population live below the poverty line. By midyear official unemployment was 9 percent. Wage arrears were the cause of many strikes, including hunger strikes, and other forms of civil disturbance.

The Government's human rights record showed little progress in 1996. Domestic and foreign human rights groups continued to document serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights in the Republic of Chechnya by both Russian military and Chechen separatist forces. Violations committed by Russian forces continued to occur on a much larger scale than those of the Chechen separatists. Russian forces engaged in the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force, resulting in numerous civilian deaths. They also prevented civilians from evacuating from areas of imminent danger and humanitarian organizations from assisting civilians in need. These actions were in conflict with a number of Russia's international obligations, including those concerning the protection of civilian noncombatants. Security forces were also responsible for disappearances in Chechnya. Chechen forces executed some members of the federal forces and repeatedly seized civilian hostages. Both parties to the conflict at times used torture, mistreated prisoners of war, and executed some of them. Tens of thousands of civilians were killed and over 500,000 persons displaced since the conflict began in December 1994.

In August the two sides initiated a cease-fire and for the remainder of the year made steady progress toward a political settlement. Russian troops completed their withdrawal from Chechnya, leaving the separatist forces in effective control of the Chechen Republic. The two sides agreed to hold elections in early 1997 and to resolve Chechnya's status within 5 years.

Although the Government has made progress in recognizing the legitimacy of internationally recognized human rights, the institutionalization of procedures to safeguard these rights has lagged. Implementation of the constitutional provisions for due process, fair and timely trial, and humane punishment made little progress. In addition the judiciary was often subject to manipulation by political authorities and was plagued by large case backlogs and trial delays. Lengthy pretrial detention remained a serious problem.

In one high visibility case that was fraught with numerous violations of due process, Aleksandr Nikitin--a former navy captain who was researching the environmental dangers of nuclear waste from the Northern Fleet--was detained by the FSB for 6 months without charge on suspicion of espionage and revealing state secrets, crimes possibly punishable by death. He was subsequently charged formally and later released pending trial.

There were reports that law enforcement and correctional officials tortured and severely beat detainees and inmates. Prison conditions worsened and are extremely harsh. According to human rights groups, between 10,000 and 20,000 detainees and prison inmates died in penitentiary facilities, some from beatings, but most as a result of overcrowding, inferior sanitary conditions, disease, and lack of medical care.

In the military, the practice of "dedovshchina" (the violent hazing of new conscripts) continued. The Government and human rights groups offered sharply divergent estimates of the number of soldiers who died as a result of abuse or suicide.

Arbitrary arrest and detention remained problems. Police and other security forces in various parts of Russia continued their practice of targeting citizens from the Caucasus for arbitrary searches and detention on the pretext of maintaining public safety.

In the face of a variety of obstacles, the media continued to represent a wide range of opinion. The major print media organizations functioned relatively unhindered by the Government, although there was evidence that the broadcast media did not give equal time to candidates in the presidential election campaign. The media reported freely on the Chechen conflict despite government pressure and heavy-handed treatment of journalists by Russian troops in the war zone. Several journalists were killed during the war, some deliberately, others accidentally; other journalists were kidnaped. In addition journalists elsewhere in Russia covering controversial issues were subjected to pressure and physical violence, including death.

The effort to institutionalize official human rights bodies stalled. In January Sergei Kovalev resigned as chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Commission to protest President Yeltsin's human rights record. Parliament failed to pass a law establishing a human rights ombudsman, a position that is provided for in Russia's Constitution and is required of members of the Council of Europe, to which Russia was admitted in February. With a few important exceptions, however, nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) documented and reported on human rights abuses.

The Government continues to restrict freedom of movement. Violence against women and abuse of children remain problems, as do discrimination against women, and both religious and ethnic minorities.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no confirmed political killings by agents of the Government. However, several journalists--including some covering the war in Chechnya--and government officials were murdered under suspicious circumstances. Some of these crimes have been attributed to organized crime or business disputes. In addition, 10,000 to 20,000 detainees and prison inmates died after beatings by security officials or due to harsh conditions (see Section 1.c.).

During the war in Chechnya, the Russian military continued its practice of using excessive force and targeting civilian populations, resulting in numerous casualties (see Section 1.g.).

Ten journalists have been killed by unknown assailants for their coverage of the war in Chechnya since December 1994--4 of them in 1996--according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The body of Nadezhda Chaykova, a newspaper correspondent who had been missing for several months, was found in the Chechen village of Geikhi on April 11. Chaykova had been severely beaten, blindfolded, and shot in the back of the head. Chaykova was the author of articles on human rights violations in the Russian "filtration camps" in Chechnya. The body of Nina Yefimova, a correspondent for the newspaper Vozrozhdeniye, was found in Groznyy on May 9. She had been kidnaped and then shot repeatedly in the back of the head. According to news reports, Yefimova had received threats in connection with her articles.

Elsewhere in Russia, some journalists investigating crime and official corruption were also killed. Oleg Slabyanko was killed in January, soon after producing a television program on government corruption.

Photographer Feliks Solovev, who freelanced for the German newspaper Bild, was killed in Moscow on February 26. Viktor Mikhaylov, a journalist for Zabaykalskiy Rabochiy, was killed on May 12 in Chita while working on a series of articles on crime and the work of Russian law enforcement. At year's end, no one had been charged with these murders.

Several government officials were the targets of violent attacks, although the assailants' motives in many instances remained unclear. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's personal physician, Dmitriy Nechayev, was shot and killed on April 26, perhaps for political reasons. Deputy Justice Minister Anatoliy Stepanov was killed by a blow to the head on May 23, reportedly after a dispute with an old friend. Viktor Mosalov, the Mayor of Zhukovskiy, a town outside of Moscow, was shot and killed on June 13. Galina Borodina, acting head of the Moscow Oblast Justice Administration, was shot and killed in her apartment building in Podolsk on June 25. Gamid Gamidov, Minister of Finance in the Republic of Dagestan, was killed on September 23 by a car bomb that exploded next to the Dagestani Ministry of Finance building.

There were several high-profile murders involving members of Russia's financial elite and other prominent figures. It is unclear whether any of these killings were politically motivated, and most appear to be linked to organized crime or business disputes. According to MVD figures cited in press reports in May and June, 560 of the 32,000 murders in 1995 were contract killings (twice as many as in 1994). The MVD reports that only 22 per cent of such cases are ever solved.

In November prominent American businessman Paul Tatum was murdered in Moscow. Although the authorities pledged to investigate the case vigorously, no suspects have been identified.

The administration of capital punishment continued to raise procedural and humanitarian concerns because of the secrecy with which such cases are treated.

In June a Moscow oblast court acquitted a suspect in the case of the murder of Aleksandr Men, a Russian Orthodox priest murdered in September 1990, ruling that the defendant was under duress and had given a false confession. Men's family had publicly stated that they believed that the evidence against the suspect was fabricated.

The high-profile murder case of Vladislav Listyev, a journalist and television executive killed in 1995, remained unsolved, as did the murder of Dmitriy Kholodov, a Moskovskiy Komsomolets journalist killed in 1994.

In December six ICRC workers were murdered and a seventh wounded in an ICRC compound, which was located in a region under the effective jurisdiction of the Chechen separatists. By year's end, no suspects had been identified, although there were widespread suspicions that the crime was committed by persons who sought to derail the peace process.

Three terrorist bombings, apparently politically motivated, occurred in Moscow during the summer. A bomb exploded in a Moscow subway on June 11, killing four people. A second bomb exploded on a Moscow bus on July 11; a third bomb exploded in Moscow on July 12. No one has been charged in these attacks.

b. Disappearance

Both federal and Chechen separatist forces used hostage taking, including of civilians, as a tactic in the Chechen conflict (see Section 1.g.).

American relief expert Fred Cuny, who disappeared in Chechnya in April 1995, is believed to have been killed. His body still had not been located by year's end. No trace has been found of American photojournalist Andrew Shumack, who disappeared in July 1995 after reportedly entering Chechnya.

Police logged a number of reports about the disappearances of Russian citizens, particularly young men, elderly people, and children. Most were attributed to criminal foul play rather than to any political motivations. According to press reports, some of the young men reported as missing had been rounded up and conscripted for military service when they could not prove that they had performed their national service.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Punishment

The Constitution prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. However, prisoners' rights groups have documented numerous cases in which law enforcement and correctional officials tortured and beat detainees and prisoners. Russian forces and Chechen separatists used torture during the Chechen conflict (see Section 1.g.).

Law enforcement officials have admitted unofficially to the Moscow Center for Prison Reform (MCPR) that they use torture to coerce confessions from suspects, often by cutting off oxygen with a plastic bag or a gas mask. (The latter method is referred to as the "elephant" torture in which oxygen is slowly cut off until a suspect agrees to confess.) Guard brutality is rampant and notorious. In addition to raping and severely beating inmates, guards have been known to pour chlorine on cell block floors and cut off ventilation.

In a February report, the Presidential Human Rights Commission noted that existing legal norms and administrative instructions failed to provide specific, clear regulation of the application of physical force and that this allowed "the use of impermissible physical coercion directed against prisoners virtually without restraint."

The practice of "dedovshchina," the violent hazing of new recruits in the military, MVD, and border guards continued unabated. Dedovshchina includes various forms of physical and mental abuse, including the use of recruits as personal servants of more senior soldiers. Soldiers often do not report hazing to officers for fear of reprisals. In 1995 the Ministry of Defense (MOD) reported that 392 military personnel died from various noncombat related causes, one-third from suicide. The Mothers' Rights Foundation and the Soldiers' Mothers' Committee believe that many of those who committed suicide were driven to do so by violent hazing or in fact died from abuse. Although the Mothers' Rights Foundation has not compiled complete figures for 1996, the group estimated that thousands of soldiers died in 1996 as a result of criminal acts by fellow soldiers or officers, by committing suicide, or by not receiving sufficient medical attention. The Foundation stated that few of these cases were referred to the courts.

Senior MOD and MVD officials acknowledged that hazing is a problem but allege that it is difficult to eradicate given the quality of recruits, who are often youths raised on the streets who have spent time in prison. According to press reports, 5.2 percent of recruits have a criminal record. Military leaders claim to make every effort to punish both soldiers and officers who take part in or allow hazing. But there are credible reports that many officers continue to permit--and even encourage--dedovshchina, and that some officers hit recruits because they are "inattentive to their duties." In a number of units, hazing is at such high levels that officers have been ordered to sleep in the barracks until the situation improves. In August Itar-Tass reported that a preliminary investigation into the suicides of two sailors on a ship in the Arctic Sea attributed one of the deaths to brutal hazing from fellow sailors. Also in August, 30 MVD

soldiers from Perm Oblast deserted, complaining of "unbearable," vicious hazing. They returned after a few days once a senior commander guaranteed their safety. Six soldiers suspected of hazing the recruits were sent to military prison and criminal cases were opened against them.

Despite the magnitude of the problem, the national military leadership apparently made no moves to implement training and education programs to combat dedovshchina systematically, nor was there any apparent progress in establishing a military police force.

The systematic abuse of psychiatry as a form of punishment has declined dramatically from Soviet-era practice, although human rights groups charge that psychiatric hospitals continue to conceal their archives and their practices. There were no reports of sane persons committed to psychiatric institutions.

Conditions in almost all pretrial detention centers and many penitentiary facilities worsened during the year and are extremely harsh and even life threatening. Yuriy Kalinin, head of the MVD's Main Directorate of Internal Affairs, stated in 1995 that "the conditions in our pretrial detention centers can be classified as torture under international standards. That is, the deprivation of sleep, air, and space."

According to the law "On the Detention of Those Suspected or Accused of Committing Crimes," which came into effect in July 1995, inmates must be provided with adequate space, food, and medical attention. Although most of its provisions were due to come in effect by the end of 1996, the authorities were not able to ensure compliance, primarily due to lack of funds and of a bail system. The law mandates provision of 2.5 square meters of space per detainee. However, detainees in SIZO's (investigative isolation wards) averaged only 1.6 square meters--only 0.9 square meters in urban areas. Under such conditions, prisoners sleep in shifts, and there is little, if any, room to move within the cell. At Kresty, St. Petersburg's largest SIZO, 5 to 15 prisoners are held in cells that were built 100 years ago to hold 1 prisoner. In most pretrial detention centers and prisons, there is no ventilation system. Cells are stiflingly hot in summer and dangerously cold in winter. Matches won't light in many SIZO cells during the summer because of a lack of oxygen.

Health, nutrition, and sanitation standards in penitentiary facilities declined due to a lack of funding. It is estimated that the MVD was able to provide only 15 to 20 percent of needed medications and medical care. Tuberculosis is perhaps the most serious health problem. The MCPR has asserted that rates of tuberculosis are 40 times higher in prison than in the free population, and death rates of those infected with tuberculosis in prison are 17 times higher than for those outside. Every month 2,000 former prisoners with active tuberculosis are released. Head lice, scabies, and various skin diseases are prevalent. It is estimated that MVD penitentiary facilities were able to provide only 60 to 70 percent of the daily food rations they envisioned providing. Prisoners and detainees typically rely on families to provide them with extra food.

Statistics are very closely held on the number of detainees and prisoners who were killed or died and on the number of law enforcement and prison personnel sanctioned for use of excessive force. According to Russian human rights groups, between 10,000 and 20,000 detainees and prison inmates died in penitentiary facilities throughout Russia, some due to beatings, but most as a result of overcrowding, inferior sanitary conditions, or lack of medical care. During 1996 the MCPR reported that according to official MVD statistics over 3,000 detainees died in IVS's (temporary holding isolators) and SIZO's and over 9,000 convicts died in prisons and penal colonies. The MCPR, however, reports that many detainees are transferred to hospitals just before dying so as to deflate the official mortality rate. Although hundreds of MVD officials have reportedly been dismissed for "unacceptable behavior" (usually corruption), there are no reports of any cases of law enforcement or correctional officers being punished for abusing detainees or convicts.

The penitentiary system is centrally administered from Moscow. The MVD, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Education all maintain penitentiary facilities. The MVD oversees about 85 percent of the prison popul