

Attachment 11

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THE "CLEANSING" OPERATIONS IN SERNOVODSK AND ASSINOVSKAYA WERE PUNISHMENT OPERATIONS

On 2 July 2001 a "cleansing" operation was carried out in the Sunzhenskiy district of the Chechen Republic. The target of the "cleansing" operation was the large village of Sernovodsk, close to the border with Ingushetia.

On 3 July a "cleansing" operation began, targeting the village of Assinovskaya, in the Achkhoy-Martanovskiy district of the Chechen Republic. This "cleansing" operation continued on 4 and 5 July.

On **1 July** a police car was blown up by a landmine in the village of Sernovodsk. 5 policemen were killed.

On **2 July**, federal forces began a "cleansing" operation in Sernovodsk.

Representatives of the Human rights centre "Memorial" were on the scene and were witnesses to the fact that the "cleansing" operation was essentially an operation to punish all those living in the village and refugees staying in temporary accommodation. The "cleansing" operation was accompanied by mass looting and extortion. Villagers' property was destroyed and ruined. For no reason, grenades were thrown into several homes.

Several hundred local inhabitants were detained and taken out into a field between the villages of Sernovodsk and Samashki. There, the detainees were interrogated to try to find out from them who in the village supported the fighters, who was a "Vakhabit", where weapons were stored etc. The interrogations were accompanied by vicious beatings and torture. Dogs were deliberately set on several people. A number of people were tortured with electric current.

During the night from 2 to 3 July the majority of the detainees were released. However, more than a hundred men were taken away to Achkhoy-Martanovskiy, to the Temporary Department of Internal Affairs.

As a result of the events in Sernovodsk, a new flow of refugees poured into Ingushetia. By **3 July**, around four thousand people had left Chechnya for Ingushetia. On **4 July**, the

flow of people out of Chechnya continued.

The "cleansing" operation in Sernovodsk was carried out on the same day that a special session of the State Duma was being held in Grozny to discuss the problem of returning refugees to Chechnya.

It should be noted that in contravention of order of the executive body of the Commander of Joint forces in the North Caucasus No. 145, the "cleansing" operation was carried out without the co-operation of the local administration. Furthermore, servicemen locked up the head of the village administration, Vakha Arsamakov and the head of the administration for the Sunzhenskii region, Khizir Vitaev.

(The word "serviceman" is used here and further on, although it has almost always been impossible to identify who exactly has been taking part in these actions. It could have been servicemen from the interior forces, OMON men [riot police] or SOBR [rapid reaction forces], SpetsNaz [anti-terrorist troops] of the GUIN [special troops linked to penal system services] of the Russian Federation Justice Ministry, and others. Federal forces personnel in Chechnya frequently operate wearing camouflage uniforms with no identification badges and hardly ever identify themselves to the local population).

They were locked in their offices and not allowed out for ten hours. All the village militia and traffic police were disarmed during the "cleansing" operation and detained by the servicemen.

On **3 July**, on the edge of the village of Assinovskaya, an armoured personnel carrier was blown up by a mine. On the same day a "cleansing" operation began in the village, which continued during **4 and 5 July**. In the course of the "cleansing" operation mass looting again took place. People who tried to stop their property being taken away were beaten. Around 300 people were detained. They were taken out to the edge of the village, into a field, where they were interrogated. The interrogations were accompanied by beatings.

DETAIL

On **1 July** around midday in the village of Sernovodsk a police UAZ truck was blown up by a mine at a level-crossing. Five policemen were killed.

Military vehicles quickly turned up at the scene. Soldiers opened fire with automatic weapons, machine-guns and grenade launchers into the surrounding woods. Then they detained two young people who were grazing cattle nearby. At first they wanted to shoot them on the spot, but the local policeman intervened. He proved that the two people could not have set off the mine. Nevertheless, the servicemen took away the shepherds. Nothing has been heard of their fate since.

Early on the morning of **2 July**, a sub-unit of federal troops entered Sernovodsk and began a "cleansing" operation. The soldiers said that the aim of the "cleansing" operation was to detain the rebel fighters who had caused the blast. However, they carried out their operation using barbaric and illogical methods.

The military servicemen burst into the courtyards of blocks, drove people out of their homes, threw grenades into attics and cellars, took any property which they liked and smashed and slashed furniture. They even began to gather up provisions in the village, killing chickens, turkeys and sheep and even digging up potatoes and loading them onto armoured personnel carriers.

It was clear that various sub-units took part in the "cleansing" operation. The worst excesses were carried out by those operating in the centre of Sernovodsk. Here, military servicemen shot at private vehicles and public transport unless the owner managed to pay them off first. In the courtyard of the home of the Mutsiyev family, two cars were shot up with machine gun fire in this way. The Madaev family had a "Zhigouli" VAZ 21099 taken away although the documentation for the vehicle was in order.

They even took a diesel electricity generator out of one building and a water pump.

Despite the fact that the village put up no resistance to the soldiers, grenades were thrown into the homes of the Movsarov, Batashev, Salamov, Arsanukaev, Ramazanov, Saidulaev and Al'tamirov families.

All the local police and traffic police department were disarmed and held by the servicemen. The head of the village administration, Vakha Arsamakov, and the head of the Sunzhenskiy district administration, Khizir Vitaev, were locked up in their offices by the soldiers at the start of the "cleansing" operation and not allowed out for ten hours.

In every yard, all males between the ages of 14 and 60 were detained. Some of those detained were able to buy their way out. A specific levy was set for this. If a person's documents were in order and he was registered locally, then this was 200 roubles. If his registration was not a local one (mainly refugees, living in the temporary accommodation centre in the buildings of the technical college and in railway carriages), then it was 500 roubles. If a temporary pass had expired or not all the photographs had been stuck into a passport, the levy was 1,000 roubles.

Several hundred people were unable to buy their way out (some reports say around 700) including two women, Mazaeva Marem (40 years old) and Gazmagomadova. Among those detained were two sons (aged 14 and 18) of the head of the village administration, V Arsamikov. A 90 year old man, Abdul-Kadyr Gubaev was also detained. Around 81 people were detained at the temporary accommodation centre and then taken away.

All the detainees were led out into a field between the villages of Sernovodsk and Samashki. There all of them, including the 90 year old A-K Gubaev were ordered to lie face down on the ground and their shirts were pulled over their heads so that they could not see. If anyone made the slightest movement, he was hit in the head with a rifle butt.

They took away the detainees' money and removed rings and watches. The soldiers also ripped up some people's identity documents.

Interrogations were carried out in a tent which they set up there.

Almost everyone was asked the same questions: was he a fighter or a "Vakhabit" ; did he

know any rebel fighters; what did he know about Basaev and Khattab. Those being questioned were savagely beaten. People were especially harshly treated if they had any scars on their bodies, even if they were from their childhood. Some people were tortured with electric shocks. Metal rings were put on their fingers and connected to an electric current.

This torture was used on: Salambek Amagov, Alikhan Basaev, Islam El'diev, Ruslan Yasakov, Visingiri Madaev, Magomed Al'tamirov. Dogs were set on Visingiri Madaev who was bitten repeatedly. The son of the head of the local militia, Vakhi Susurkaev, was savagely beaten.

At around 10.00pm on **2 July** they began to release the detainees. By 2.00am, most of the detainees had been released.

Salambek Amagov, 35, was dumped unconscious outside his house. When he was lifted up, blood poured from his throat. His relatives took him to the Achkhoy-Martanovskiy hospital.

More than one hundred of the Sernovodsk villagers who were detained were taken to Achkhoy-Martan to the Temporary Department of Internal Affairs.

As of **7 July**, there was no news of the whereabouts of Apti Isigov, Selimkhan Umakhanov, the brothers Bataev, the brother Muzaev and Ruslan Makhaev (an invalid from childhood who is 1 metre and 30 centimetres tall).

On **8 July** Ruslan Makhaev was freed.

Supplement (September 2001)

In September 2001 two persons among the detained inhabitants of Sernovodsk disappeared.

- **Apti Isigov, born in 1978, who lived on 34, Nervomayskaya Street, was taken into custody by soldiers in his house in front of witnesses. Isigov spent some time with other detainees in APC, but was not taken to the filtration center.**
- **Zelimkhan Umkhanov, born in 1972, who lived on 4, Kutalova Street, was taken into custody by soldiers on Sernovodsk Street in front of witnesses. Umkhanov spent some time with other detainees including A. Isigov in APC. He also was not taken to the filtration center.**

Supplement (May 2003)

We still do not know what happened to Apti Isigov and Zelimkhan Umkhanov. Criminal investigations suspended this case of disappearance because of the “incapacity of representing persons subjected to prosecution”.

On the day after the "cleansing" operation (**3 July**) a large number of local people and refugees decided to leave Sernovodsk. People were leaving because soldiers had told them that they were going to "clean up" Sernovodsk for 7 days and promised to "wipe the village from the face of the earth". Many women literally threw out their sons, insisting to them that it was better to sleep on the ground than to be killed or maimed. During the day, around 4,000 people walked or drove out into Ingushetia. At first they made their way to refugee camps in the village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya (Sleptsovskaya), and then dispersed to various places, afraid to stay together.

The exodus of people from Chechnya into Ingushetia continued throughout the following days. And people began to leave other villages as well. However, starting on **8 July**, some Sernovodsk villagers began gradually to return.

It should be noted that the "cleansing" operation in Sernovodsk was carried out on the same day that a special session of deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation was being held in Grozny to discuss the problem of returning refugees to Chechnya. The chairman of the government of the Chechen Republic, S Ilyasov, expressed his opinion at this session, that it was only the lack of money that was preventing the return of people. However, it is very clear that the Russian budget will not be able to guarantee returning refugees enough money to be able to buy themselves or their loved ones their freedom each time there is a "cleansing" operation.

On **3 July**, on the edge of the village of Assinovskaya, an armoured personnel carrier was blown up by a mine and federal positions were shot at. One policeman was wounded.

That day, a "cleansing" operation began in the village, which continued on **4 and 5 July**. During this "cleansing" operation there was again mass looting. A 68 year old inhabitant of the village, Gaurgashvili, who tried to stop servicemen taking things from his home, was badly beaten. Relatives were able to take him to the regional Sunzhenskii hospital in Ingushetia, which saved his life.

Supplement (September 2001)

During the "mopping up" operation in Assinovskaya, four local inhabitants have been taken away. Two sisters, Aishat and Raishat – 17 and 18 – who were accordingly taken into custody because of the fact that they were wearing long coats and headscarves. They had been told that "Wahabitts" wear this kind of clothes and therefore suspected them of being linked to rebel fighters. The sisters stayed three days in Achkoi- Martanovskij VOVD before their relatives gave a ransom in order to get her free.

Two other sisters – 26 and 28 – were taken into custody from their house because there was their brother's electrical equipment that could be used to make bombs, landmines etc... Their brother was electrician and he went out of Assinovskaya, the day before, for business purposes. The girls had been detained in

Achkhoi-Martanovskij VOVD. According to them, they had been hit in order to get information about who had put the landmines on the roads. However, after the interrogations, they had been released without demanding ransom.

In Assinovskaya about 300 people were detained and taken out to a field on the edge of the village. There they were interrogated. The questioning was accompanied by beatings. Among the detainees was the head of the Assinovskaya administration, Nazarbek Terkhoev.

On the evening of **3 July**, the majority of the detainees from Assinovskaya and some of those villagers from Sernovodsk who had been taken to Achkhoy-Martan, were taken out to a wooded area near the village of Chemul'ga and released. For around 24 hours they remained in the same place, as it was as dangerous for them to go through the wood as it was for them to use the roads, blocked by military personnel. Only on **5 July**, by risking their lives, were they able to make it to the village of Chemul'ga, from where they were able to return home or travel to Ingushetia.