Written testimony of Sasha Koulaeva, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH, www.fidh.org) Head of Eastern Europe and Central Asia Desk, for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of April 15, 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for being here to listen to us. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) where I work, is a Federation of over 160 Human rights NGOs all over the world. In Eastern Europe, Russia always used to be one of our priorities for its considerable historical and geopolitical weight in the region and in the world. Since the beginning of the 2000th FIDH started to work closely on Chechnya, a small Russian republic suffering from one of the most outrageous conflicts in the last decenies, and the number of FIDH fact-finding missions was organized their and in the neighboring republics.

From 2007 through the first half of 2008, it may have seemed that peace and stability had been achieved in the Chechen Republic, albeit at the price of the serious violations of human rights that had occurred in preceding years. The rate of armed conflict had undergone a stable decrease and losses in the security forces had decreased. Human rights advocates reported fewer cases of the illegal use of force on the part of government employees. In January 2009, Kadyrov, president of the Chechen Republic, proclaimed that there had been a complete and final victory over the insurgency and terrorist underground. According to him there remained only a dozen or so insurgents in hiding.

However, starting in late 2008, it became obvious that it was premature to talk of stability having come to the Republic.

In the summer of 2009, the greatest losses among law enforcement personnel occurred in Chechnya, increasing by 150 percent compared to the previous year. In 2009 a series of terrorist acts were committed in Chechnya, including those using suicide bombers.

Losses of military and police personnel decreased significantly compared to the previous year. However, at the end of the summer the insurgents demonstrated their ability to concentrate relatively powerful forces and deliver telling blows to their opponents. A striking demonstration of this was the nighttime attack in August 2010 on Kadyrov's home village Tsentoroy (Khosi-Yurt), which he was visiting at the time. For clear reasons, this village had been considered until very recently to be the safest place in Chechnya.

It is important to underline that whatever happens in Chechnya even controlled tight by President Kadyrov, it is always reflecting the move given from Kremlin. For example, in the run-up to the constitutional referendum in Chechnya during the spring of 2003, over the course of two months we were unable to document a single instance of abduction. This was after Russian President Putin appealed to the people of Chechnya to vote for the constitution so that nobody would "come knocking on their door at night." However after the referendum, the machinery of violence resumed its work and has yet to cease: disappearances and torture continued in Chechnya.

In recent years, a significant number of former Chechen insurgents has been accepted into the ranks of the Chechen Republic's Ministry of Internal Affairs and granted amnesty by the authorities. A failure to investigate the abduction, murder, and torture of people in Chechnya has become one of the main factors enabling such crimes. The impunity with which members of Russian security agencies have been able to carry them out has become absolute. By now, in

almost 170 cases, the European Court of Human Rights has handed down verdicts stating that the government of the Russian Federation bears responsibility for the murder and disappearance of people in Chechnya. But the Russian government has not followed through on a single one of these verdicts of the European court by launching an investigation.

Not a single prosecutor has been relieved of his post in any district of Chechnya for failing to investigate instances of abduction or murder. Not a single military commandant or head of a district internal affairs branch under whose jurisdiction "unidentified individuals in armored personnel carriers" abducted people and then passed unimpeded through government checkpoints has been put on trial. Not a single investigator has even suffered disciplinary action for failing to carry out the most obvious investigative actions in criminal cases initiated based on murder or abduction. Every single prosecutor serving a term of duty in the Chechen Republic has been promoted and given new assignments within Russia proper.

Sometimes we hear allegations that the current situation in Chechnya is the fault of the republic's own government. Under Russian law, for example, prosecutors, investigative divisions, and the republic's Ministry of Internal Affairs do not answer to Ramzan Kadyrov. They are federal structures. And if the federal authorities are displeased with the work of these officials, they can remove them from their posts or take other measures at any time. But this is not happening. Instead, among the first Russian generals to be reappointed to his post in connection with the reorganization of the Russian *militsiya* into the what is now being called "police" was Ruslan Alkhanov, Minister of Internal Affairs for the Chechen Republic, who has headed that agency since 2004. It is also noteworthy that the president of Russia reappointed Ramzan Kadyrov to head the Chechen Republic. His inauguration took place on April 5, 2011. The Kremlin must be satisfied with their performance.

Given that human rights organizations, in contradiction of statements by the government, are constantly reporting gross violations of human rights in Chechnya and neighboring republics, the government has taken the simplest path toward resolving this contradiction – it has begun to persecute these human rights activists and organizations. On July 15, 2009, a leading Memorial staff member, Natalya Estemirova, was abducted and killed in Grozny. This murder was entirely due to her professional activities. The crime has yet to be solved. On August 11, 2009, in the Grozny office of the organization Let's Save the Generation, its head Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband Umar Dzhabrailov, were abducted. Their bodies were found the next day with signs of torture. In July 2010, Kadyrov declared employees of Memorial to be enemies of the people.

Criminal proceedings initiated at Kadyrov's request against Oleg Orlov, Memorial's chairman, are currently underway.

However, it is completely obvious that the armed underground in the North Caucasus and terrorism were spawned not by human rights activists, but, more likely, by the actions of the government itself.

A portion of the population of Chechnya believes that the Russian Federation used the war on terror as an excuse to occupy the republic in 1999-2000 and that the occupation should be resisted. This fact, coupled with Chechen "historical memory" of their extermination by tsarist Russia during the Caucasus wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, followed by the deportation that took place in 1944 and the war of 1994-1996, leading to the deaths of approximately 50-80,000 Chechens, expand the ranks of the dissatisfied.

In the North Caucasus, the Russian authorities have applied the full force of their repressive apparatus to the conflict between two Islamic communities – adherents of traditional and Salafi

Islam, taking the side of the "traditionalists." To some extent, the government has prohibited practicing the religion in the form considered correct by the.

There is a high rate of unemployment and corruption in the North Caucasus, as well as clan favoritism practiced by the government. Meanwhile, everyone knows that there is no way for them to peacefully change or replace this government. A sense of despair is one of the things that drives people to join insurgents.

The "Chechenization" of the conflict had a notable effect in the campaign against armed resistance during past years. However, it is obvious that today this resource has been exhausted.

The authorities of the Republic are not able to keep Ramzan Kadyrov's promise to totally annihilate the underground and the insurgency. Furthermore, the totalitarian regime, based on force and fear, itself has given rise to new resistance. Young people are again going over to the insurgency in the mountains. The Republic government's response to this development was extremely harshly and it is again gambling on the use of illegal force. This force is increasingly expanding in scope and becoming open and defiant.

I thank you for your attention.

Sacha Koulaeva