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## Chechnya

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# CHECHNYA

**HISTORY:** Chechnya is not recognized internationally as a sovereign state. It declared independence from Russia in September 1991, adopting the name Chechen Republic Ichkeria. In December 1994, the Russian Federation sent troops in the republic and used mines extensively. A peace agreement was signed in 1996, including the delay of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria's official status until Jan. 1, 2001. Chechen leadership currently claims the independence of their republic but Russia maintains that Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation. Chechen law has been established but Russian law still applies. The humanitarian situation in Chechnya deteriorated steadily from the end of the war in 1996. A lack of humanitarian assistance and the withdrawal of nearly all international organizations pervade Chechnya, due to the security situation. Russia has faced a wave of international disapproval of its current military offensive in Chechnya.

## LAND MINE AND UXO

**OVERVIEW:** Both sides used mines during the Chechen conflict, around bases and checkpoints, in cities and sewers, in houses and even on the corpses of Russian soldiers. Russian officials admitted that they mined the main road between Grozny and Nazran in March 1995. The HALO Trust said it had seen new mine fields laid by Russian Interior Ministry forces along Chechnya's border after the 1996 peace agreement. At present, armed groups and armed robbers use anti-personnel mines.

## VICTIMS AND CASUALTIES:

There were as many as 500 civilian mine casualties during the war in 1994-1995. The numbers increased following



the war as people returned to their homes. Since the war ended in 1996, there have been an estimated 600 to 800 landmine casualties, half of whom are reported to be children. The majority of children are suffering psychological trauma. Chechnya is one of the poorest of the Soviet republics with a health care system that was already inadequate before the war. Current reports state that there are 3,500 people in need of artificial limbs. The Chechen Orthopedic and Prosthetics center in Grozny ceased working in 1995 when Grozny was leveled. In Grozny, two-thirds of hospitals and clinics have been destroyed. Because of the kidnapping and murders of foreign aid workers, international humanitarian organizations have been almost absent. Information in other regions is difficult to gather because of a lack of data organization.

**DEMINING:** No mine field maps have been made available and no survey conducted. Funding for demining is almost nonexistent. The budget does not allow for humanitarian demining. The

responsibility has fallen on Russia, but their financial crisis has limited any action toward the goal. The HALO Trust purchased equipment from Russia and received a donation from the UK Ministry of Defense with the plan of training 100 deminers.

**WAR REALITY CHECK:** The Russian Army lured rebels into a mine field in early February 2000. Survivors said their commanders had told them that the Russians were letting them slip out of Grozny for a bribe—a frequent tactic often employed. Khamzat Tisayev, who was wounded in the foot, said some fighters sacrificed themselves to clear a path, running ahead to set off the mines for the 2,000 fleeing fighters. “The boys marched on the mine and shouted to us: ‘Meet you in paradise!’ Survivors walked on the bodies of their dead comrades to survive crossing the mine field.”

When the rebels, clad in their winter white camouflage, finally reached Alkhan-Kala, they laid scores of wounded on the snow near the hospital, which was too small to take care of all the casualties. Baiyev, the hospital chief, performed amputations with a hacksaw without any painkillers or antiseptics. “These people don’t know that they have gangrene and are doomed,” Dr. Malika Sabiyeva whispered, turning away from the wounded men. “We don’t know what to do. We have nothing to help them.”

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