

CHECHNYA: RUSSIAN CRIMES AND WORLD'S SILENCE

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The UN Human Rights Commission had passed a resolution in the last week of April calling on the Russian government to set up an independent inquiry into accusations of rights violations in Chechnya. Calling for a "national, broad-based and independent commission of inquiry", the resolution was presented by the European Union and supported by the US and others. The Commission was "gravely concerned by the continued violence in Chechnya and reports indicating disproportionate and indiscriminate use of Russian military force, including attacks against civilians which has led to a serious humanitarian situation."

In view of the unabated brutal use of force by Russia, this Resolution of the UN Commission is like shedding crocodile's tears. Moreover, it is unfortunate that it took some half a year for the 'international community' to adopt such a resolution. It is really a belated effort and thus has already lost much of its significance. One wonders as to what really stops the UN and Western powers from taking solid and timely action.

The weakness and the self-serving approach of the World Community and the Muslim leadership, particularly the OIC, are a blunder history would never forgive. Similarly, the silence of the UN and its Secretary General, who has the honor of belonging to the Third World!, would serve to erode whatever was left there of the oppressed people's trust with the international organizations. Eric Margolis of the Toronto Sun is right in saying that:

Those who observe a monstrous crime and do nothing should feel guilt for it. We begin the 21st century watching silently as a brutish Russia, which knows neither shame nor mercy, crushes the life out of a tiny but heroic people who refuse to bend their knees to Moscow's tyranny.

Five Russian Crimes: Russia and its leadership have committed, at least, five grossly heinous crimes and should be held accountable for each of these. It deserves the punishment of war crimes just like the Nazi German of the past and Yugoslavia of today.

Aggression: The first crime is the unjustified armed invasion of an independent state. Russia has given two lame excuses. The first one is that at the instigation of Chechnya, an 'Islamic state' was established in two towns of Dagestan. If the people of Dagestan opt for enforcing Islamic teachings in their own areas, it is neither a crime nor can one object to it. Moreover, Chechen leadership had categorically described it as an act of the region's people and had denied that it had anything to do with it. The second excuse was that Chechen exploded bombs in a Moscow area and thus killed 200 people. Not only that Chechen government or its people had nothing to do with these explosions, later facts have established that none but Russian secret service was involved in placing the bombs in both cases so that this may be used as a pretext to invading Chechnya. The world media had suspected the Russian claim in the very beginning and daily Independent, London

and Economist had denied it through reliable sources. The drop scene, however, came later with the red-handed arrest of the personnel of a Russian secret agency, Federal Security Council, while placing the third bomb.

These excuses are, thus, product of falsehood and trickery. Even if accepted for the sake of argument, there could be no justification for aggression against an independent country in the presence of the Agreements of 1958 and 1994. This was a naked aggression, pure and simple, with the aim to eliminate the Chechen nation. A horrendous crime against humanity, this can be best described as 'genocide'.

Human Carnage: The second crime was the despicable attempt of genocide, of ruining the entire area and wiping out the whole of population. In fact, this is part of the criminal course the Russian leadership is committing since the 16th century. In 1944, by forcing exodus on Chechen and Tatar nations, in which 1.5 million people succumbed to hardships and misery, Stalin tried to eliminate a generation. In 1994-96, more than 100,000 people were massacred. In September 1999, Russia launched an attack on Chechnya with latest weaponry with 125 to 200 daily air strikes, each with 15 to 45 warplanes. Thus, thousands of tons of ammunition were dropped each day. The latest M-16 planes and M-1 gunship helicopters were employed for these strikes. Long-range artillery was used day and night. Cluster bombs, Napalm bombs, Chemical bombs and even toy bombs were used against the population. All big cities, including Grozny, Godasmir and shall were completely destroyed. Thus, a country of 1.2 million population and 13,000 sq. km. of area presents a picture of a ruin. More than 300,000 people have migrated and are living very miserable life while the remaining has become homeless in their own homeland.

Despite the blatant use of force and the huge imbalance of power, the army, which had invaded with the claim that it would complete its occupation in two weeks, and which has done whatever it could in destroying the country and dispersing its population, is compelled to admit that the war may drag on for many more years. The speaker of the Russian Duma Mr. Gennady Selegnev pronounced on March 5:

Chechens are not the kind of people who admit defeat. The presence of Russian troops in Chechnya will last for decades. (The Nation, March 6, 2000)

Russian forces' use of force and the extent of destruction along with the war crimes provide sufficient basis for holding them as criminals against humanity. Talking to the US senators, Russian scientist Andre Sakharov's widow Elena Bonner has said in clear words that:

Russia's war against Chechnya is a dastardly criminal act against humanity. For political benefit Putin has waged this unjust war. Lack of strong action by the world has encouraged Russia to continue its bloody war in Chechnya. (Quoted in Commentary, Bulletin of the International Movement for a Just World, Kuala Lumpur, February 2000).

Video films of Turk and German war correspondents and witnesses of the US Human Rights Group and Amnesty International prove that Russians are guilty of committing dreadful crimes of genocide, torture, concentration camps, mass killings of those innocent and helpless men, women and children who were fleeing the war-hit areas, and mass-graves.

Killing for Political Gains: Russia's third crime is that it committed war and genocide merely for personal political gains. Yeltsin government had failed on all counts. Five prime ministers were made and unmade in just three years. Crimes were on the increase. What was being called a democratic experiment was nothing but a mockery of it. Luke Delahaye of Newsweek has thus summed up his experience of ten years:

Ten years after the beginning of reform, injustice is installed as a system. It would be simplistic to talk only about an economic disaster confronting the people we met. The land is one of violence, abandoned children, tuberculosis, drug addiction, prostitution, homelessness and of course - now more than ever - alcoholism is what Russia now faces, and what I have photographed is a deep social, moral and cultural crisis.

In such circumstances, it was clear that Yeltsin and his cohorts had failed and that he could not win the forthcoming presidential elections. Moreover, Yeltsin, his family and cronies were tainted with allegations of worst financial corruption. Therefore, with the peculiar Byzantine mentality, a bloody scheme was prepared for coming to grips with the situation. Leveling allegation on Chechnya, an army invasion was planned. Vladimir Putin, a confidant of Yeltsin and KGB's former head, was made prime minister and appointed presidential candidate and acting president, in quite a dramatic move. In one of his interviews, Putin has thus described his character:

I was a hooligan, not a pioneer. Seriously, I was a real ruffian. (The Times, March 17, 2000)

This is no secret that Putin was hands in glove with Yeltsin in financial matters and that he could be trusted for protecting Yeltsin's interests. Putin provoked national chauvinism and used the war to cover up the failure of the Yeltsin-experiment. Playing with public sentiments and exploiting the war hysteria, he gambled for political ends. The heinous plan we are talking about is nothing secret. Irony, however, is that the UN, the US, the European nations and even the Muslim rulers did not bother to condemn Russian aggression and stop cruelty. Newsweek's correspondent writes, three months after the war:

Three months ago it appeared that Yeltsin's enemies were going to win the next presidential elections. In the Kremlin, the idea that Yeltsin and his inner circle might be held accountable by a successor regime for alleged corruption became a major concern. Today Moscow cynics believe the war in Chechnya coming just three years after Russia's last engagement there ended in defeat, was a desperate measure to create a vehicle on which a pro-Yeltsin candidate could ride to success. (Dec. 20, 1999)

The last act of this game was staged on Dec. 31 when Yeltsin appointed Putin as the acting president and who in return guaranteed in writing that Yeltsin and his family would not be subject to any accountability. This all happened in the open but failed to move what is called the 'world community'. This betrays its being an accomplice!

Pillage: Russia's fourth crime is that its war is of greed and plunder of resources just like different nations of Europe had been imposing on humanity during the last 500 years. The reasons that account for Chechnya's importance include its agricultural potentials, mineral and energy resources and its geographic centrality. It provides key to access Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Central Asia and Caspian Sea. The pipeline for the supply of Azeri oil, for which agreement has recently been signed between Azerbaijan and some Western countries would go through Chechnya. Similarly, Kazak pipeline goes through Chechnya to Russia. To control these resources and to keep these areas under its influence, Russia wants to dominate Chechnya. That is why, despite repeated humiliations, it is prepared to go to any extent, like eliminating entire populations, to realize its design. This is purely a colonial war, a condemnable attempt for controlling the resources of others. This, in itself, is a crime against humanity.

Hostility against Islam: The fifth in the list of Russian crimes is its hostility against Islam. Islamic revivalist movements are a major target of Russian propaganda. These are being defamed as 'Wahabism'. Derogatory remarks are used against Afghan Jihad. Osama bin Laden's specter is haunting them. Sufi Islam is emphasized (though the fact is that Naqshbandia and other Sufi chains have been in the vanguard of struggle against Russia).

The question is: how can Russia or any other country force people in not living life according to their own beliefs and ideals and rather accept a subordinate role, to Russia or any other hegemon. This is a pure colonial approach, tolerating which may lead to ideological downslide and suicide.

West's Connivance: While Russia has been committing these crimes, the US and Western nations have fully helped it in carrying and continuing the bloody game. This suggests that they are all accomplices. America and European Community's countries hold that Chechnya's is Russia's internal issue. Clinton and Albright said they supported Russian efforts against terrorism. Even when some references were made to 'human rights' and 'disproportionate use of force', the admonition was in so mild words that it could only encourage the perpetrators of cruelty. During this whole period, America and Germany extended full financial assistance and technical support.

IMF and Western countries provided billions of dollars to Russia that, according to its finance minister Mikhail Kasyanov, enabled it to manage its defense budget. He had clearly said that Russian forces needed weapons, food and finance and a review of the budget was necessary in the wake of war in Chechnya. In July 1999, IMF extended \$6.2 billion and invasion on Chechnya started just within six months. Recently, IMF has pledged to provide additional \$3 billion. Once Germany indicated on a cut to assistance, but was prevented by America whose president, Clinton, began to

see democracy in danger. Clinton connived at Putin's crimes and rather applauded him. The US Security Advisor Sandy Berger was audacious and shameless in saying:

The United States is not considering ending of economic assistance in protest against Moscow's policy towards Chechnya... Cutting it off would only be against our interests. (Statement, Dec. 20, 1999)

The basic reason for this is the fact that America and Russia have no difference in respect of their interests.

Lian Levin, Amnesty International's representative, quite clearly said that:

The 15-member UN Security Council would not take the initiative on Chechnya because two of the Big Five - the United States and Russia - have struck a deal.

Russian crimes in Chechnya were possible only with the silent and all-out support of America and Western nations. Eric Margolis has rightly said that:

The Clinton administration, which is largely financing Russia's genocide in Chechnya, supplied Russia attack helicopters with advanced US night-vision devices 'to combat terrorism', says the White House. Bill Clinton recently called for 'liberation' of Grozny by Russia. Yet he cannot understand why so many Muslims see America as their enemy.

In view of these facts, it is obvious that the resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission is an attempt to cover the complicity of the so-called international community in general and Western powers and the US in particular in Russian crimes in Chechnya. In fact, this is yet another evidence of West's dual policy and discrimination against Muslims. On the other hand, the brave and unflinching struggle of the Chechens has not only exposed the vicious collusion of Russia and Western regimes but also the weaknesses and lack of political grit and insight on the part of the leadership in Muslim countries. The struggle has also established the fact, once again, that a nation that endears independence and is prepared to pay for it can never be subjugated.
