

Sergei Kovalev from Grozny by phone, December 19, 22:00

Today a group of deputies led by the Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation [Sergey] Kovalev drove to the area of the settlements Achkhoy-Martan, and Novy Sharoy, where they had many conversations with soldiers and officers, including those of a fairly high level. From these conversations it is clear that the Russian military distinctly understand that development of the conflict will entail increasingly more serious casualties among the civilian population. In doing so, their negative attitude towards such a prospect is obvious.

Kovalev was a witness to the bombing of the Department of State Security of Chechnya (around 20:00). "Maybe," said Kovalev, "this is also a strategic objective, but the pressroom of the Government of Russia forgot to report that the building of the department is located in the midst of the heavily populated central area of Grozny."

Strong evidence suggests, Kovalev emphasized, that the decisive development of events will take place tomorrow.

On the issue of the fate of the Russian population of Grozny, Kovalev reported that according to his knowledge, the Russians are being offered to be evacuated to the mountains with the Chechens, but many prefer to stay in the city.

Kovalev believes that the gravest mistake is to call what is happening the disarmament of illegal armed or criminal organizations. "The reality is that Russia is dealing with an armed populace. You can disagree with the myths and legends of these people, you may not have respect for the policies of their leaders, but you cannot ignore the entire people, you cannot think that you can defeat the people."

The incompetent and brutal actions of Russian officials, which completely ignored the national character of Chechens and their history, only unified the Chechens and sowed a deep mistrust towards any official moves of the Russian side. Each subsequent act of force makes the chasm of misunderstanding even deeper.

Kovalev believes that these days a crime is being committed not only against the people of Chechnya, but also against the Russian soldiers.

[signed by Semina]

[Translated by Sarah Dunn for the National Security Archive]

Source: Memorial Society Archive, Moscow, Russia]

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