

Beslan Massacre



Immediately before this Annual Report was due to go to final print, terrorists seized a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, on the first day of the academic year, traditionally a time for celebration in Russia, taking as many as 1,200 people hostage. The terrorists held these hostages in appalling conditions for three days, refusing them food and water. The siege ended tragically on 3 September. At least 338 people, half of whom were children, were killed. Hundreds more were seriously injured. In a region that has seen many tragedies, this terrorist atrocity was unprecedented in its horror. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wrote to the Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, expressing his revulsion at the inhumanity of terrorists prepared to put children through such suffering. The Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, condemned the attack in the strongest terms saying that it was "almost beyond belief that any group of human beings could conceivably have thought that any cause whatever would be advanced by taking hostage innocent, young children and subjecting them to this kind of terror and then ensuring the death of so many of them".