

Angelina Jolie's Russia Journal

Tuesday, August 19, 2003

The UN compound at the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, was hit by a car bomb leaving 22 United Nations staff dead and at least 100 injured (*click [here](#) for details*). I am shocked by such a senseless act of terror. For the United Nations family, August 19 was a black Tuesday, perhaps the darkest moment in the UN's recent history. My heart goes to the colleagues, families and loved ones of those who lost their lives in the bombing.

Wednesday, August 20, 2003

I received a call from Geneva. They ask me if I wanted to reconsider the mission. I said "No". There has always been a security concern. Now everything is more intense. All aid workers feel especially vulnerable now that the UN was targeted in Baghdad. They also tell me that my schedule has been leaked.

"Some people will be angry at you for being UN or helping the Chechens, even though we know you are there for Russian people also. Angry extremists will not see it that way and you will be a target. If they want to find you, because the schedule was leaked, it will be easier now. They can get very close. They can even disguise themselves as press." I said I wanted to go forward with the mission. And also I expressed of course how sorry I was about their friends. What can you say, when men like Sergio Vieira de Mello are killed? Except the world needs more people like him and it's a loss for everyone that he is no longer alive.

Thursday, August 21, 2003

6:30 a.m. It is a gray English morning. I have been in the car for the last 30 minutes trying to look over all my final briefing notes. I try to get my head around the situation in the area. Why is there excessive violence and for so long? The first war in Chechnya erupted at the end of 1994, almost 10 years ago, with scores of civilian victims. There was a brief period of relative calm for 2 years but the conflict resumed in 1999 and it is still going on. Terrorist attacks are common even beyond the region boundaries up to Moscow (hostages at the theater in Moscow in October 2002 for instance). Missions I have been on before seemed to me to be extreme, important situations. I was surprised to read that I have only been to areas that are considered security phase 1 and 2. Parts of Russia are phase 3 and 4. If areas of the Russian Federation are so bad why do we hear so little about it in the news? If the humanitarian situation is so bad that it is a humanitarian crisis and even aid workers have been kidnapped and killed. Why is it not all over the news? I am not being critical of any international organization, the UN or the government. I really don't know the answers or what can be done. Whose responsibility is it?

On the plane I have finished my briefing notes. (Click [here](#) for a brief chronology of the Chechen crisis.)

Here are the statistics on attacks on aid workers in the Caucasus region between 1995 and 2002:

Murder/ assassinations (excluding mine incidents): 11
Kidnaping/ hostage taking: 29
Attempted kidnaping/ hostage taking: 15
Targeted shooting incidents: 19
Assaults (including sexual assaults): 15
Vehicle/ cargo hijacking: 8
Armed robberies: 20

Abductions are widespread in the area. According to official statistics some 1,807 persons from outside the region were abducted in the region since 1994, sometimes for weeks only but often for longer period until either they were released or their corpses found by the side of roads. This figure does not include hundreds of local Chechens who are also victims of abductions. Here is a summary of some prominent individuals who have been killed or abducted:

Summer 1995: kidnapping and slaughter of American aid worker, International Organisation for Migration.

In December 1996: slaughter of six foreign aid workers, the International Committee of the Red Cross.

From July 1997 to September 20, 1998: Ms. Camilla Carr and Mr. Jon James, British aid workers who worked for a Russian organisation called the Center for Peacemaking and Community Development.

From March 8, 1997 to November 17, 1997: Mr. Andi Chevalier, Mr. Pascal Porcheron, Mr. Laurent Molle, Mr. Regis Greves-Viallon - four French aid workers, Equilibre humanitarian organisation, were kidnapped from Dagestan, neighboring Chechnya.

From July 3, 1997 to October 20, 1997: Mr. Andre Christopher, Frenchman, staff of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

From November 23, 1997 to July 25, 1998: Mr. Gabor Dunaiski and Mr. Isztvan Olah, two Hungarian aid workers were held in captivity.

From December 17, 1997 to February 9, 1998: Five Polish volunteer aid workers who were delivering medicine, food and other supplies.

From January 8, 1998 to June 1998: Mr. Daniel and Ms. Paulina Brolin, Swedish missionaries who worked for the Pentecostal church, were kidnapped from Dagestan.

From January 29, 1998 to December 12, 1998: Mr. Vincent Cochetel, Frenchman, Head of UNHCR Office in the North Caucasus, was kidnapped in North Ossetia.

From May 1, 1998 to November 13, 1998: Mr. Valentin Vlasov, Russian President's personal envoy to the North Caucasus region.

From September 29, 1998: three Britons: Darren Hickey, Rudolf Petschi and Peter Kennedy and a New Zealander, Stanley Shaw, engineers working for the British telecommunications company Granger Telecom. Their bodies were found on the outskirts of Grozny on December 8, 1998 beheaded.

From March 1998: Mr. Gennady Shpigun, Russian Deputy Interior Minister. Shpigun's body was found in Chechnya in the spring of 2000.

From May 15, 1999: Mr. Ribero Geraldo Cruz, New Zealander, ICRC, was kidnapped in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic.

From January 9, 2001 to February 2001: Mr. Kenneth Gluck, US doctor, MSF.

From July 2002 to December 2002: Ms. Nina Davydovich, the head of Russian non-governmental organisation Druzhba, which was working with UNICEF.

The MSF head of mission in Dagestan, Mr. Arjan Erkel, a young Dutchman of 32 years, was abducted on August 12, 2002 and no news has been received from him since then (*click [here](#) for MSF website*).

The film on the plane is "Goodbye, Mr. Chips", I didn't watch it, I had no headphones, but it was clear it was about a teacher and his students during World War I. I looked up at one point because 3 ladies in front of me started to talk passionately about what happened in the movie. I think the young women are explaining it to their mother. One of the students had returned from war, wounded. The 3 women are crying. As I finish writing about that I am still on the plane, the film is still on, and they are still crying. I would not have expected 3 Russian women to relate to this film but of course, they do, war is the same everywhere. I imagine they are acrying so hard because they are thinking of their father or brothers.

We are about to land. When filling out the Customs Declaration card something stands out. Check the box "yes" or "no" if you are bringing in: weapons (of all descriptions) ammunition or explosives. Drugs and psychotic substances, antiques, objects of art, radioactive materials, high frequency, radio-electric devices or any means of communication. I have to smile at the absurdity of someone actually checking "Yes".

Out the window, as we land, I see dense green forest as far as the eye can see. The airport is gray, misty with light rain. Everything about this area of the world feels heavy.

Moscow

I have an official briefing in a meeting room in the airport. I am welcomed by the Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe, Raymond Hall, who has come from Geneva and accompanied by Jozsef Gyorke, a former Hungarian diplomat now heading the UNHCR office in the Russian Federation.

Russia is the largest country in the world with a territory of 17 million square kilometers spreading from Europe to the Far East of Asia and having 11 time zones (*click [here](#) for the map*). It is a country of extremes. 20% of Russia not fit for living. Such harsh weather conditions 7 to 8 months out of the year down to minus 40 degrees below zero.

Russia is the third biggest producer of oil in the world. They also produce large amounts of gold and diamonds. Someone says, "There are many rich people but many, many more poor people without jobs." 150 million in population. Every year 1 million less and the birth rate in Russia is the lowest in the world they need to replenish the population but they still are not easily receiving return of ethnic Russians. Life expectancy of a man is under 60. The health care is very poor. Education is very good. The major religion is Orthodox Church but there are also 20 million Muslim. Chechens are 100% Muslims. I ask about Putin, his history in the KGB. It is then pointed out to me that my former president George Bush Sr. was head of the CIA. I wasn't sure what to say in response to that.

In Chechnya there have been no schools in Grozny for 10 years. Chechnya's current population 1 million are mostly all together in the areas least affected by the wars. Chechnya was annexed into the Russian Empire at the time of Catherine the Great at the end of the 18th Century but only after fierce resistance that lasted for years. During the Soviet era, it was attached to Ingushetia and they both formed a single Republic within the Union. During the Second World War in 1944, because he believed that they were supporting the Germans, Stalin ordered a mass deportation of a large part of the population far away to Central Asia. I am asked "You left your small child in London?" "Yes", I said. "That is better, where we are going, it's too dangerous."

Our first stop is a children's hospital. We arrive. I am brought into a room to meet with the head doctor. I ask what the needs are for orphans and others. "We have what we need for well being and basic care. But we don't have money for clothing or for serious medicines". The doctor is a wonderful, cheerful man. He is one of those great doctors that seem so grateful to be blessed with the ability to help people. The doctor speaks of Leukemia, blood cancer, how expensive that medicine is. "We cherish our orphans. I feel rich and poor is not relevant we can still give attention care and love." After the orphaned children are given medical care they are sent to a children's home.



Moscow. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

They take us to a ward with 20 orphans. It is an old hospital, not run down but very basic just maintained. There is a room full of cribs. A four month old and a 6 month old baby are alone in a room. "Some are abandoned at the maternity ward. Some are left on the road". They are so beautiful, perfect, sweet and so little. Bright blue eyes with soft patches of blond hair.

I meet with some of the orphaned children. "Many, many abandoned children many of them looting on the streets. The main cause is poverty. The desperation in many people is from unemployment, poverty and drinking, that makes many unable to be fit parents. Many are good parents but they are poor".



Moscow. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

We are about to enter the leukemia ward. We sit on the marble steps and are given, hand made, cotton shoe covers as we walk in. I see a few more of the nurses, you can feel tension. I can see through the glass, children mostly boys I would guess around 10 to 13 years of age.

I stopped writing for a while because I was able to visit with 2 boys. One of the boys was with his mother and the other with his grandmother. They are brilliant young men so strong, smiling one boy said he was having complications, he was saying this is the longest time he has been in treatment, but it's "not so bad." I ask what he likes to do. "I love music, when I get out I want to learn how to play the piano."

7 p.m. Official Dinner

The following government officials were present:

- Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Igor Yunash, First Deputy Head, Federal Migration Service
- Mr. Vladimir Parshikov, Director, Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Mr. Andrey Demidov, Deputy Director, Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Vladimir Yakovlev, Counsellor, Department of Humanitarian Cooperation and Human Rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The Russian officials include Yuri Fedotov who is the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am just stunned by the building. Mr. Fedotov explains he does not live there but that he is able to use it for official purposes. As an American, even one who has traveled, this is the kind of place I have only read about in books or seen in movies. Everything looks as if it belongs in a museum. I have to be asked to sit down. The other guests are waiting for me, but I really am not sure if we can sit on the furniture. I am beginning to feel I will often be stunned in Russia. It is an extraordinary place. The history. The architecture. It is such a rich culture. And as we enter the dining room and begin talking of war and displacement, the moment we sit I am reminded of how many times this area of the world has been in conflict. How many dinners like this have taken place? I feel privileged to be here to witness the evening.

Many things are discussed. Natalia Obukauskene is the associate translator in Moscow. She helps the Russian officials and I understand one another. She never gets a chance to eat. No one stops talking. It feels like there is so much they would like to say, to explain the Russian point of view. After awhile my mind is racing. They seem like such good men. They speak of the needs of the Chechen people, how the government has been working with some Chechen NGO's and civilians in the last 2 years successfully and about money being set aside for people to rebuild their homes. They say shelter is the first priority then, of course, then security. I know UNHCR feels security is first. But I realize it is complicated.

Also everyone agrees about the need to totally rebuild the infrastructure for the people to have jobs. The Russians said during the Chechens "independence" nothing was working. "It fell apart." I am sure the Chechens would say the Russians were partly responsible. But maybe it is lack of outside help from the International Community. Do the Chechens deserve their independence? Why? If so, who should help them? If not, how do they ever, after all that has happened, accept they are Russian? And as part of the Russian Federation will they be helped by their brothers? Can they ever feel brotherhood again? Can both sides forgive, forget and move on to a future together? Those are my questions, to which I know there are no simple answers.

Someone from UNHCR mentions the Balkans returns and rebuilding. The Russian Minister Yuri Fedotov says you should not compare this situation to the Balkans, they are very different. "They are separate states. We are all the Russian Federation." Chechens have their residence in the Russian Federation. They tell me when I go to the camps tomorrow to "keep a cold head, a level head." "They say it is worse than it actually is." They tell me many people want to go back home to Chechnya. This is a debate I have been aware of. Whether it is voluntary or involuntary repatriation? No one can force people back to a situation where they fear for their lives. But if you make

their lives somewhere else unbearable and they have no choice this can be considered forcing them back. I am not saying this is happening only that I know aid workers look out for it and it may or may not be the case. During dinner they bring out delicate crystal glasses. We sip Vodka. And every time I take even the smallest sip it is refilled. I am trying not to drink to stay focused. The dinner felt like it went on for days.

Friday, August 22, 2003

I'm up at 6am to leave Moscow for Ingushetia. It is a beautiful early morning in the capital. I travel with Raymond and Bill from UNHCR. Bill is from Maryland and has been based in the Vladikavkaz for 8 months. On the way to the airport I am told about the camps closing. "One was closed last Christmas. There is a camp with 12,000 people in it. It is the poorest camp. Because the tents are a strong visual, the Russians want to shut down the camp to send a message of things improving. They have made it difficult for UNHCR to replace the tents. One week you can and then the next you cannot. Then there would be a ban on tents. Whatever the case the people in the camps have no where to go home to yet. Families with young men are the most nervous to go back. "They disappear, young men in Chechnya, untraceable simply never heard from again. The winters in the Caucasus can be minus 6". I am asked if I could imagine that in a tent, I cannot. Box tents are what they call cardboard with plastic tops. Sounds horrible but it keeps them warmer and they can dismantle them and move them if the camp did close.

MSF built houses in Ingushetia but IDPs have not been allowed to live there yet. "And the box tents?" The authorities say box tents are not fit for human accommodation. So they don't help distribute them in the camp. But they do however, ironically, want UNHCR to supply them inside Chechnya so people will return. Apparently inside Chechnya they are fit. The population of Ingushetia is only about 350,000. At one time they hosted 250,000 Chechens, almost equal to their entire population. The housing in Ingushetia is very long, extended houses for the whole family to live in. All generations.

At the airport a man tells me about his trip 2 years ago to Grozny. "Completely leveled I've never seen anything like it in my life." He is not the first person to say that to me about Grozny. "There is nothing there. People were sleeping at the railway. We had security around us on the trip. It was welcomed because we could hear gunfire." He goes on to say he can't imagine it has changed much. He personally doesn't understand how it is really possible to return. Return to what? Safe how?

We go over maps on the plane (*click [here](#) for the map of the Northern Caucasus*). The first thing pointed out is Mozdok. "This is where the recent bombing at the military hospital took place. On August 1, a single suicide bomber rammed a truck through the military facility's gates and detonated an explosive charge equivalent to about one ton of TNT. 50 were killed and 72 wounded.

The Caucasus are the mountains and they are larger than the Alps. The Northern Caucasus is made up of North Ossetia, Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. The Southern Caucasus is made up of South Ossetia, now part of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 90's, civil wars erupted in this region. I ask how many civil wars are going on in the Russian Federation. I am told in Georgia which was part of the Soviet Union, now independent from Russia. There are 2 wars that have been going on for the last 10 years: in Georgia over the coastal region of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there have also been wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan fighting over the control of the mountainous enclave of Nagorno Karabakh, between Ingushetia and North Ossetia and finally in Chechnya and Dagestan.

The road to Bella camp is the same road you would take to Grozny. It is very close to the border. Both at the dinner last night and in the plane it is explained to me that the elections in Russia are coming up. The government has offered 10,000 rubles to anyone who will return. That is money to rebuild. It is tempting even if it isn't safe. The government built apartments in Grozny and they have already filled them and now they are looking for temporary shelters like box tents. People in camps are constantly threatened with the idea of the camps closing. Everyone including UNHCR feels if people want to go home they should be allowed with whatever assistance is available. The question is, if they had a decent option of life in a camp would they, at this time, go home at all?

I am briefed on security. "The calm can be very deceiving. You are an American you are high profile". Recently, the US Government and the UN declared a Chechen leader as a terrorist. So security is a concern. We know you don't want an entourage so they will stay back, but it will be heavy and please understand there is a reason for it."

Ingushetia is a non-family duty station for UNHCR. Bill's family are now in Macedonia. "We get a stress isolation break every few months but" he says, "you are usually so tired you sleep right through it".

On the plane I am shown pictures of Grozny. I have asked if I could include them in this journal if it is ever published.



Grozny, Chechnya. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

We land in a small run down on airport. There is only one other plane on the runway getting serviced. UN vehicles are there to meet us. Meet with Mytrantia officials. On the runway brought into a room for a security briefing. John the security counselor based in Moscow gives us all a basic understanding of the area. Abductions, mines and unexploded ordinances on the road are mostly in Chechnya. Most are concerned about driving through residential area “can we please wear seatbelts at all times, reckless. Another thing being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Not much we can do about that try to plan ahead with security”. John gives radios to UN Staff. This makes me think of the staff that lives here. Everyone has to go through this briefing and for good reason.

I meet Alexi a young man who will be driving me. He is from the area and very nice. I receive another briefing by Azlan. We will now drive 20 minutes into Ingushetia with a 5 minute stop on border with officials, then to the Bella Camp. In the last year a new man has become president of Ingushetia and

that has changed things. His name is Murat Zyazikov, he did all his career in the security services at various levels before being elected President of Ingushetia on 28 April 2002. I will meet with him tonight.

On the Kavkas highway the trees are green and yellow a sign of autumn. This is the road to Chechnya. It looks so peaceful. We pass a field of sunflowers as far as the eye can see. There are also many cows and old red brick building with thin metal roofs. We reach a checkpoint where many cars are stopped, an old couple is at the window going through paperwork. We drive through; we will stop at the next border.

We stop and shake hands with Vice Prime Minister, I am handed roses. Everywhere I go I am handed the most beautiful flowers all day yesterday and it continues. This is a very hospitable area of the world clearly people take pride in how they welcome their guests. Things can become very official and elaborate in this area. Because of the real purpose of my mission they understand I simply want to get to the camps as soon as possible. They wave us on.

Out the window I see many big red brick houses still simple but beautifully built where extended families live together. Women and children on the side of the road selling what look like bags of grain and dried beans. Eight army tanks pass us. I am told they are just back from Chechnya.

Bella Camp

At the time of the visit:

Bella Camp is one of the 5 tented camps in Ingushetia. There are some 1,000 people living there, in 150 canvas tents. This camp has recently been the focus of the authorities who want to close it. Already some people have been forcibly evicted and found refuge in an abandoned factory nearby from which they were again forced to move out. Finally they were allowed back in the camp.



Bella camp, Ingushetia. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

These are where the old tents UNHCR are unable to replace because officials are convinced the camp should be closed. Ingushetia and Chechnya have the

same language. We drive past the border of Chechnya. In Ingushetia there are 200 temporary settlements. The people many with strong stern faces open expressive faced clearly hardened by all that they have seen.

I see a little boy must be about 7 with a pistol stuck in the back of his shorts. He is with his mother carrying what looks like a bucket of water. Any structure that can be a home is one. Old shed, barns, etc. These people are clearly very poor and yet these are the ones who welcomed the Chechens. Again I am reminded that those who have next to nothing, the poorest people tend to give the most.

We drive into the camp. It is like two dusty tent villages. As we drive in it feels like a foreign place. Only pictures can describe it. All I can think is "how this can happen?" Children run up to our cars. We get out and walk up to one tent. They welcome us, excited to have visitors. It is Chechen tradition that if a guest comes they have to put their best out. For them it is small wooden bowls with a few pieces of fruit and some biscuits they had clearly been saving. I sit with 2 ladies, very warm. The kind of women you wish for in a grandmother. One lady says she has 7 children. "My husband was killed in the bombing we want to stay until it is safe. People are afraid to return to Chechnya, afraid to lose their children. We have been moved a lot since we left Chechnya. It has been more stable since we reach camp. Before we would have temporary shelter maybe a few weeks and then kicked out on the street with nothing. We have nothing now, but each other". She says she has heard they will cut what little electricity they have here. (Part of the feeling of being forced back) "This is not the first time they have threatened us. Tents are leaking, the floors are rotten. It is warm enough now but we fear winter coming. But with even how bad we want to stay at least here we will stay alive. We know UNHCR has a new box tent of good cardboard they can not give them to us. We know some families who returned to Chechnya. When they were held in detention centers, some members of their family went missing. They want us to also know how grateful they are to Ingushetia government.

Outside walking to the next tent. There are men there with guns. Inside the next tent "Thank you for visiting," a man says. I notice boxes of sugar from the Red Cross. "Mass Media give us the face of Osama Bin Laden but we are simple people. I am a father. We are threatened a lot. According to constitution we are citizens of Russia. We should have equal rights. When will we go home? When will president Putin declare end to his operations in Chechnya. This was the biggest camp. Now it is the smallest that is from threats. Please, if you can do anything, please ask people to let us stay safely here."



Bella camp, Ingushetia. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

The wife explains how they want us to return to Chechnya, “but there is war there.” While she is talking she struggles with her small baby. The older boy of 6 takes over. All they have to entertain the baby is what is around the tent. They bang spoons on cups and pipes. They speak of electricity and the light that warms the food and the rooms. “Even if they cut the gas and electricity we will find a way to survive.” The mother sits with me. “We are here since 1992. We are here 11 years.”

Her husband cuts in. “UNHCR has box tents but the Russian Federation won’t allow us to have them so winter comes we don’t know what to do with our children. We want to stay here not go back to Grozny. We are scared. They can force us it is not safe.”

As we leave for our next visit, some of the women start crying. They surround the car showing their children. I’m suddenly crying. Not because of how poor and sad, but because they all smiled, waved and thank me for visiting them.

We get back in the car to drive to the other nearby camp. All the little kids. Their lot in life is so unfair. Still they run after the car smiling and waving. So grateful for a visitor for someone willing to hear them, to simply acknowledge them.

The lady who is helping me translate smiles. She is an internally displaced person (IDP) herself. She studied French, English and law before she had to leave Chechnya. She hopes to finish her law studies one day. Things you don’t think about with war. How everyone’s life stops a dead.

We arrive at the next camp and enter a very large tent. Young men and women are brought in for a traditional Chechen dance. They are in the most elaborate, beautiful costumes. “Marso!” This means peace and well being. They tell me they want to say ‘Hello’ to me in their dance. I feel so hot but I don’t want to remove my sweater because of my tattoos. There is boy sitting next to me just came from Chechnya one week ago. I ask him, “Are you happy to be here?” “Yes.” he says. “We are very happy to have a visitor to give us a moment. We would like to share.” They dance. I have never seen anything like it in my life. The adults in the room become emotional. They are so proud to see the youth carrying on the traditions so well. I have never seen

such strong spirit. I wish the world could see what I am seeing right now in this moment. It's amazing. Fascinating. They are dancing and banging their knees on the wooden floor. The dance leader brings us to his tent. First he thanks us for supporting the dancers. They have been there 4 years, "These children have been growing up here." He asks us to thank the president of Ingushetia. He helped give the visas for a special trip to Prague to put on a show.

The man says he came to the camp with no job but told the NGOs, "I can teach dance", and they let him work with kids. And then someone donated these costumes. "We will keep together when God willing we return to our motherland." I ask him about returning home. "My home is destroyed. I can't guarantee my family is safe. On the way home people are disappearing." They offer us tea and we accept. They give us rice with a little sugar courtesy of WFP. The rice is from the Islamic Relief organization and the sugar, oil and salt are from WFP.

A 13 year old girl who was helping serve the food. Quietly asks, "Do you consider me a terrorist like the world does?" I feel my heart in my throat. "Of course not," I say. "Thank you," she says. I don't want to write anymore. I just want to think about what just happened.

As we leave the camp I am still thinking of that little girl. We drive back into town to a temporary settlement. I am taken into a room, it's like a shed. But for 7 people it is home. "Since the beginning of the war in Chechnya no food no nothing. We came here in winter time. We found empty garages and asked local families for materials to fill holes and make a roof. Our homes in Chechnya were burned down. The main thing is schools for our children. We had a building here but it was burnt down. We don't know what happened. Of course, they missed so many years in Chechnya. So it has been hard to catch up. When we left Chechnya we thought we could return soon. We can't return to Chechnya mainly for our young men. At night they have been known just to take them." The young kids gather around to hear us talk. They are so friendly and well behaved.

One of the older women says, "I am 100% sure our school was burnt down on purpose. Some people want us to leave. Our children don't have anything in their lives except a chance for an education. There is no place for us to return. They can abuse us. My eldest son works in a boiler room. 1,400 rubles a month which is about \$35." Pension for the elderly lady is about the same. The young boy also gets pension because during the first war he had suffered trauma. He lost 80% of his vision. On top of that, last year, the boy's mother got cancer. "We sold earrings, watches and friends begged for help. We were able to raise the money for the operation. We had a bad car but it was something. And land plots in Chechnya. We sold it all."

"There is the possibility of being given 10,000 rubles if we return to Chechnya. That money is to build a home. It is tempting because we have nothing. But I still don't care, nothing is worth losing our lives. We went through so much during the bombing. The village we were from in Chechnya was completely destroyed." Again I am asked if I want a cup of tea. I say yes to be polite

suddenly all 3 women the 2 girls and the eldest boy rush out. One grabs cups and the other grab a hidden box of cookies in an old tin. I ask them what was Chechnya like 20 years ago? They let out a moan of happy memories. "We had a very beautiful, green town. When you see it now and compare it to how it was you want to cry. Now all we want is peace. We can live in rubble we are used to it." Do you have hope for a future, for Chechnya? Can it be what it was? I ask. "As they say, hope dies last. As for me I am too old I know I won't see rebuilt, beautiful Chechnya in my life."

We are so grateful to the Ingush people. If we did not have them and their hospitality where would we all have gone?" As we drink tea someone comments that all the men are outside and in the corner. The ladies laugh. I think this must be a rare occurrence. As we leave and thank them for allowing us to visit they say, "We wish you good health. Do you have a child?" Yes, I said, "We wish also for him good health and blessings."

I am then brought to speak with some of the elders. I am presented the eldest man who sits. He tells me about how since 1999 the military have been taking young men and burning houses. "When I start to think about Chechnya my heart burns. There is pain in my heart. I am thinking all the time about all the dead in Chechnya." We sit in silence.

Next I sit with two sisters in their late 70s who live in a small room. It has two cardboard walls and some concrete walls with all cardboard floors. "In September 2000 bombing started and we packed what we could and brought our mother she is 100 years old. We have no men in the family." I ask these women, are they expected to return and rebuild a home themselves? "If they withdraw troops and peace returns we will return to Chechnya. It is home, Even if we just go home to die."

I ask if it is alright to write in my journal. "Yes," they tell me. They want you to. It means they are going on record. It tells them their voice is important so please write often. It is often hard to press the international community for assistance in a country that is considered a wealthy country. "It's not that the government and federal haven't invested in the areas they have. But as you will see, there is a lot left undone. By the time the journal is released winter will be coming.

5 p.m.

Meeting with the president was very official. He and the men he works with on one side. Myself, UNHCR and an interpreter on the other side. It feels as if you are about to face off for a debate but I found it quite the opposite. The President is very charismatic and straightforward and I found meeting and talking with him very pleasant.

President Zyazikov is the President of Ingushetia. He is very charming and very direct. He is political and smart. Upon leaving he presents me with Ingushetia's highest award a medal of honor. "For coming to this area and seeing it for yourself, and meeting the people." I didn't know what to say

except “thank you”. It should be given to aid workers and the international community. Actually the more I think about it the international community should give notice to Ingushetia for hosting an amount of Chechens equal to their own population.

I asked about Arjan Erkel, the head of mission for MSF who was abducted. He admits he knows nothing of the situation. I suggest he speak with UNHCR and MSF. I was surprised he didn’t know of Arjan, but he was abducted from another region so I suppose it is understandable. And also, sadly for him this is one case of many. I thanked him on behalf of the Chechen people for allowing them here. He spoke of their return home. Again like the Russian officials he says housing first priority then security. I don’t personally agree. I think it needs to be the other way around. He says he is willing to work with the humanitarian aid workers for the IDPs.

I don’t dare ask about why he is not allowing the box tents, but eventually I do ask and he has a very intelligent answer. “I assume they are better but they are fire hazards. And they are erected in an uncivilized way.” It is hard to argue that. Except dusty old tents with holes are not “civilized” either. He agrees.

It feels a bit like conversations here go in a circle. But I also don’t feel he is being dishonest. Without prompted questions he says. “There will be no water or electricity cutting. We are denying them nothing.” I hope that is true. It will be clear in September.

8 p.m.

Reception with UNHCR staff with other aid workers. I met doctors from MSF, members of UNICEF, a man from the Red Cross and with other local NGO’s. During the evening I got a strange call from Colombia. “They have called 6 times.” It was one of the strangest calls I have ever had if not the most unusual. People from inside Colombia found me all the way over here. It was morning for them. Could I say some words to the Colombian people and did I have plans to visit. It was so random, and with all the security concerns, it even crossed my mind that it was a trick just to make sure all of us were in the hotel. And that something might happen. But that was a fleeting thought. Instead I said a few words about wanting peace and stability for the Colombian people.

That was it. They said “Have a good morning,” I explained it was an evening in Russian and we said goodbye. It was really strange.

Back at the reception the doctors told me that very close to where I was today, there were 4 Chechen men were receiving medical aid. They were called rebels and fired upon. One was killed. They may or may not have been rebels. “It happens all the time here, it’s just not in the news.”

Saturday, August 23, 2003

North Ossetia

North Ossetia is one of the North Caucasus Republics within the Russian Federation. Most of the people there are closer to the Russians, sharing the same religion. There is a South Ossetia but it is now part of Georgia.

Nadian from UNHCR North Ossetia office meets with us and gives a briefing. Today we meet refugees from Georgia. Some have been integrated locally. On a lighter note they are famous for their pies. You won't be able to leave North Osettia without having one.

Many still have no answers. Some families can "fall through the cracks, be forgotten." Today we will focus on the elder population. 10 years these people have been in this situation. UNHCR has built little houses. 70 last year, and they will build more this year. For the people who are considered the most vulnerable. "These people are living in very dreadful conditions. That is why we (UNHCR) have been personally active in housing. We do work really well with the government here."

On the road we take of North Ossetia. The population is 750,000. The language is Ossetian and they are largely Christians. Some are Muslim. 85% of refugees are from Georgian majority areas, the others are from the region of South Ossetia which is part of Georgia. There is ethnic conflict between the Georgian and Ossetian. 6,500 refugees are in 52 collective centers spread out around the area.

The Children's Fund works with UNHCR to help monitor people. There is also an organization that works with children with physiological problems. There is a real need for that here, as it is in all areas when people are affected by war and displacement. Also, since the weather here is harsh with fierce cold many children are infected with TB.

Today the sky is very clear and in the distance we can see the Caucasus Mountains. They are massive and so beautiful. They are snow capped all year round. The section of them we drive towards is the border to Georgia ([Click here for the map](#)). I imagine desperate people trying to cross. How difficult that journey must be.

We enter Vladikavkaz the capital of North Osettia and go directly to a collective center. We are met by Narina and Illiana with the Children's Fund. There are 300 people (73 families) here. We are followed in by a soldier before we enter a room he runs ahead to clear. Here it is a custom for men to go through a door first ladies second. In case someone attacks you when you enter the room. I ask if that is really true. They tell me it is.



Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia. UNHCR/ T. Makeeva

In the room, I meet Fedocia. She is a sweet old lady who lives here alone. "I used to live with my husband and son in Georgia I had a good life in Georgia once. Even a savings, but in the war I lost everything." Her arms are so strong her hands thick and callused. I ask where her family is. She starts to cry. "I lost my son. He got sick here. He died in this room. I live alone here. Sometimes I ask neighbors to stay with me because I am frightened. My only source of

income is pension it is enough only to buy bread and milk." She receives 800 rubles a month which is about \$25. I wonder if she has money for medicine. She says something. Before it is translated, the way she says it, I see the depression. Her eyes well up, she looks up then looks away. She picks at the dirty plastic table cloth. Then it is translated, she says, "It is better to die than to live like this. I want to ask you for something but I know you can't provide it. Make me young and strong again so I can survive this." It seems the old are not an investment. I look around at this room knowing when we are gone how sad and silent her life must be. She says very politely, "I know you all do what you can. If you say you have, I believe you but if a home becomes available or a little more aid. I would be grateful." Bill promises to come back next week and spend more time on her individual case.

We move on to an even more run down area of the center. A shanty town. Old cement building, pieces of plastic metal or cloth fill in holes and missing walls like patch work homes. Another old lady is living here. She is 79. The smell inside all these rooms is old damp even though the sun is out today, because the building is cement it is cold and damp inside. She tells us about her husband. Her husband participated in the Second World War, he lost a leg. She tells me what a good man he was. I ask if she would want to return to Georgia if it were possible. "No, I have lost my house my belongings. My son was killed in Georgia. I put a nice stone on his grave and even that was stolen." She also has very strong thick hands, I can imagine the life she has lived, all she has seen and done. How hard she has worked and then after all that because of politics and war, her life ends here. When you have nothing you realize how important family is. It is everything. People often forget that when they have things like jobs, money and security. Men here are lucky if they get a manual labor job. The wages would be something like 1 or 2 dollars a day. "Firewood here is expensive," the woman says, "so we go to the forest and collect it with an ax."

I go outside and talk to the children. "It takes us an hour to walk to school." They say they have been here for 12 years. So many children were born here and know no other life. Many want to be actors but they have no theatre or anyone to help them study. I think what my life would have been like if I was

born here. Will these young women ever get a chance to express themselves creatively?

Next we visit a woman with two children 12 and 14. "When we first came the kids were 3 and 5. This is all my children know." The mother works in the collective fund as a dairy maid. She does not receive money. They pay her in food. She receives financial aid for the children. She has no way to get rubles to pay the electricity. I try not to think about the future but to focus on day to day." I ask how hard it was to cross a border alone with 2 small children. "It was difficult but it was difficult for everyone." She has lost her paperwork showing forced migration status. She fears she will be evicted before she is registered. She starts crying. Then her little girl turns to the corner and starts to cry. Bill then explains that UNHCR is talking to Migration Services to figure out concrete solutions to help all these problems. That is why I am proud to represent UNHCR. A protection agency, for moments like these when problems would otherwise be forgotten or ignored and vulnerable person open to anything.

We walk around to the outdoor toilet and showers. Pigs and chickens are in small broken down old pens. Everything is very dirty, broken and rusty. It smells horrible you can't imagine people actually live here. The people in this center especially the elderly seem to have lost all hope.

We then drive an hour. On the way, we pass what they call the Holy Forest. The story goes --- a man was hiding from his enemies and prayed to God for somewhere to go. It was then that he saw this forest. People now come here often to pray.

A group of horses cross in front of the car. Minutes down the road about 15 cows are resting in the middle of the road. Most all cars on the road, with the exception of aid or military vehicle, have old dusty paint jobs and look like they are from the late 60's. We go to where people have been successfully reintegrated. They have left collective centers. Like our last visit. And have gone to a new place where the government allocated plots and UNHCR built homes. The government will start to build a school for the children. UNHCR says they are still working on funds for school supplies. They are also working to help people with disabilities and maybe if they can, build a playground. The people are having difficulty finding jobs but they feel they at least have hope now and shelter. They need what is called community mobilization. There is a lack of NGOs in this area. However, the Danish Refugee Council has recently offered materials to 100 families who have received plots.

We arrive at the houses. They are small. 36 square meters 6 by 6. 86 of them. We meet Valentina from the Children's Fund. She takes us to visit the families. First we meet an elderly lady with a son. She says she is most grateful to have a house because her son must have a place to bring a bride if he is ever to get married. He is not here. He is disabled but still he must work.

The next woman we meet is so happy to have this home. It is basic and small but she is so grateful. Her hand stays on her heart as she welcomes us. She

has a beautiful toothless smile with the kindest eyes. She talks of her daughter who died. Her husband died in North Ossetia. "I had to organize the funeral from another borrowed home. Out of tradition it is the worst thing to have your casket not in your home." She wishes her husband could see this place. When we say goodbye and she insists on kissing all of us.

The third woman we meet is pregnant and holding her small daughter. The little girl is 2 ½ years. She was born in the collective center. The woman says she used to have another child. She tells us a horrible story of how she lost him. "He fell into the boiling water and died from extreme burns. The stove was on the floor level. That was all that was available. But," she says a moment of gratitude, "we had been for 13 years in the collective center. We could never dream we could have our own place again one day. We want to work, we will work very hard." As we leave she starts to cry. "I'm sorry. I am just so grateful."

We visit another house, an older woman with children. "I feel now after years of living so badly. We have dignity now." The young woman brings me a gift of socks she knitted for my son. "We dream about training and an education". It makes me think of all the opportunities I have had growing up in the states and how much I took for granted. The mother tells me how she would do any job. "Anything," she says.

Outside we walk to an area where benches have been placed and the community has gathered for a traditional welcome. A young man and woman in traditional dress step forward. I have the first bite of bread. They dance Georgian and Ossetian. We toast. The first toast is to God. Then the second toast is to St. George and to the warriors, travelers and the journey. The third toast is to the friendship to the occasion on which we have gathered right now.

"We wish happiness to you and to the little one in your life." We drink home made beer and vodka. There is a sip after every toast. Most of us pretend to drink. "It is with friends that make our road in life better." All the food on the table is from the gardens in plots behind the houses. I see the hard work and dedication of people. "It is, in fact, the fruits of all of our labors." We say goodbye. I thanked them, in both languages, with help.

We drive back to the capital to have lunch. We arrive at Fiona's house and walk up 3 flights of stairs. "We live together like this since 1997 when the head of our office was kidnapped in 1997."

There is a reception with some UNHCR staff members. Some people brought their children. They were all so lovely, gracious and warm. They all tell me wonderful things about Bill. How he doesn't even seem like a boss, how much he cares, and how hard it is for him to be away from his family.

After lunch we visit a collective center. I see how the UN is committed to the elders and everyone in the collective centers. There are over 100,000 refugees from Georgia, Central Asia and other regions from the former soviet space. "UN represents for us the moral support as well as physical from the

international community,” one man says. Everyone seemed very pleased to see all from the UNHCR. “Not always grateful to UN even though UN is always there to help local people. Government is often not grateful. The last century was very difficult for multi-ethnic people. This decade was full of conflict however we are proud to be a mix of faiths/religions.”

The staff spoke that night of how you can speak to the youth about tolerance and on behalf of the youth affected by the way and displacement. They hoped my next visit was towards the end of next year because that time is so important for them. They said they are all working towards having cultural centers to share our various ethnicities. A specialist in migration field delivers a lecture in international relations. “We are creating an internet center for consultation in immigration law.”

On the plane on the way back to Moscow Raymond and I start talking about the bombing in Baghdad and how much everyone at the UN felt. UNHCR loved Sergio Vieira de Mello and knew him well. He was with UNHCR’s field staff for over 20 years. We talked about all the deaths and all the victims. When you think about how their only purpose was to help the Iraqi people with their future, it doesn’t make sense. Kofi Annan said it best, “The death of any colleague is hard to bear, but I can think of no one we could less afford to spare, or who would be more acutely missed throughout the United Nations system, than Sergio. Throughout his career he has been an outstanding servant of humanity, dedicated to relieving the suffering of his fellow men and women, helping them to resolve their conflicts and rebuild their war-torn societies.”

Since 1992, 236 UN civilian staff members have lost their lives in the line of duty due to security incidents. Among them were 15 UNHCR colleagues:

Tekuye Muhe
Lourenco A. Mutaca
Boris Zeravcic
Alhadji K. Sanneh
Jose Lopez Herrera
Mehrali Mahmoodi
Zekarias Hailu
Peter Otieno
B. Germain Lugano
Felicien Bucyekabili
Samson Aregahegn
Carlos Caceres
Pero Simundza
Mensah Kpognon
Josue Nsakala Boakono Tshiama

Not only the UN but ICRC and NGOs have also suffered many fatalities over the last decade.

Upon return to the hotel I met with American fighter pilots who are here for an air show. Some based here some in Germany some in North Carolina. Two of them are a husband and wife team.

We all express how much we loved being in Russia and how warm the people are. They laughed about a police escort that went 30 miles an hour and everyone passing them. I tell them I think they are very used to speed and controlling it. They invited to the show and I told them of my interest in learning to fly. They said I could sit in a jet if I wanted. As tempting as that is, my schedule won't allow for that to morning.

"You have to come back in June to Russia and see the northern lights." I have heard of them. I never imagine I could come and see them. There is so much to see in this world. So many things to discover. This is my first trip to the Russian Federation and I feel I have only touched the surface of these remarkable people. There is much we can all learn from each other. Certainly a lot I can learn from them.

Sunday, August 24, 2003

Moscow

Our first visit this morning is to African refugee families living in Moscow. There are skin heads in Russia and the Africans face a lot of problems. There have been attacks on refugees here. Xenophobia, or a deep dislike of foreigners, exists. To be safe, they stay in the center of the city where there is a smaller chance of an extreme attack. There are 7 UNHCR community centers in Russia, 4 in Moscow. I go in with only an interpreter. It needs to be as personal as possible. It is an old dirty building. A 2-room apartment. The family has only one room the second room is shared by someone else. They open the door. Big beautiful smiles. A family sleeping the father says. They were doing repairs at night time so that is why they are so tired.

He wants to speak in French but tries in Russian. Life is very difficult here it's disturbing. It was very different to place their young child in school. "It is hostile. They do not like Africans here." As they talk, I think of Africa, so open, beautiful. The pride of the people. Such a natural life, animals, red earth and fresh air. There is such a community feeling a strong brotherhood. Here the parents sleeping on the old tapestry rug on the floor. The children are in a crooked fold out couch. It's a damp floor with cracks. The man's parents were killed in Angola. They were going to be next so they had to flee with the children.

They say the landlord has raised the rent again. They asked if they could let a friend sleep on the floor to help pay rent. The father can't have an "official" job. So he works as a loader long hours. Always returning home late at night. He was attacked twice by skinheads. It's so sad to see them here. Since 1995 they have been here. They have a very good chance of going to Canada. Canadians should be proud to be an open multi ethnic, multi cultural society.

There are no African families who have successfully integrated here. The police give them a very a very hard time here. We say they can go back to bed sorry for waking them. They say they are happy we came and that it is O.K. it is time for church.

Many of these Afghans here were working with the Russians when the US and Russians were fighting in Afghanistan 20 years ago. Still they face harassment. Last year an Afghan man in broad daylight was beaten to death waiting for a trolley bus.

Last week an Ethiopian man who works with a local NGO was jumped by 20 skinheads. "Fortunately, he did survive." On the way to visit the next family, we drive past many poor Russian people, old ladies preparing fruit and vegetables cart to sell in the market. We pass a children's park full of adults poorly dressed. Some are reading. Some are smoking. I wonder if they sleep there. It reminds me often in countries where local citizens are struggling it is not easy to ask them to think of the needs of others.

In Moscow it is common for asylum seekers but it is also common for Russian families living in Moscow to share apartments because it is so expensive. We ring the buzzer of a new building and wait for a response I see a poster reminding Russians to change their passports. Many still say Soviet Union. The poster is a picture of a proud Russian family holding new passports. Finally, a man answers the buzzer and we head inside.

We meet a man from the Congo, his wife and a little girl. The little girl is 6 years old. Music is playing from an old radio. Very Congolese. They are an extremely musical passionate people. They all have beautiful faces. I have to say it is strange to hear them speak fluent Russian. They tell me they left the Congo because of violence and came here to study. "But we got here and found it difficult to continue studying; When the Soviet Union collapsed the new Russia start charging a lot. I could not study, but because of war I could not go home either." I asked him what he was studying. He laughs when he tells me he was studying international relations.

We ask about problems he is facing the security concerns. "One of the men I worked with was attacked and now he has lost one of his eyes. He was placed in a hospital but they said they were not satisfied with his paperwork so he was not treated. I would one day like to leave this country. Especially for my daughter." I asked him if he would like to go somewhere else. To a normal regular country where a person can be free, where human rights for all are respected. "We miss Africa. It is home." I tell them I am going to the Congo. They smile when we speak of areas in Africa. For a moment, everyone seems happy.

I ask the wife of her experiences. Some Russian women are kind. Of course most all Russian people have been very kind but there are very hateful groups here also. I think of Congo and how different life is for them here. But you see as I've come to realize for many people life is simply about survival. They don't have options. They can't afford to have preferences.

We drive to the Perovo Community Center. Some local “hooligans” have marked the community center with cruel words. We are greeted by young children. They are Afghan children. 6 of them meet me with smiles and flowers. We are then brought to a room filled with teenagers. I ask them how they feel being here. One girl replies, “We are no one. We are nobody here. When you are young you have dreams, to be something. What can we become? In Moscow we have been in jails for 2 hours or 3 hours for nothing.” The woman from UNHCR explains to me when you are a young girl and the police ask for documents and have none in Russia you can be held in jail. The main problem here is getting authorities to give documents like they do in other countries. To give them, the children, simply an identity. The DAFI program is sponsored by the German government who give scholarships for refugees.

So a few of the young people in this room will have a real chance to get a job. “We all want to achieve something in our lives. We talk about possible stability in Afghanistan.” They are concerned that they have been gone so long and they speak mainly Russian, that now they would be outsiders in their own country.

We meet with older Afghan women. There had to be translation of English to Russian and Russian to Dari. Then from Dari to Russian and Russian to English. The women here are a support group for each other. “We don’t have proper documentation or any job opportunities and it is hard to get supplies of any kind. But we are very happy our children are getting an education here. And that part of some studies are about their own Afghan culture. That is very important to us. We want them to know who they are.” The ladies know I have been to Pakistan and visited with Afghan families. They ask me “What are your impressions of Afghan women?” I say “Wonderful hosts, very kind women.” They are very happy to hear it.

Next, I meet with a local NGO mostly made up African men. Refugees have many problems. “We decided we should help ourselves and not expect or wait for help. So with the support of HCR, we have formed an NGO.” The other problems are lack of housing, employment and schooling. These all exist because of our lack of status and lack of proper documentation.” There are posters of refugees from all over the world up on the walls. There are also pencils drawing of Kofi Annan and Einstein (who was a refugee). I ask if there are human rights laws that give them right to the documentation they are not being given. “There are always laws, but who will enforce them.”

Vera is a Russian woman with UNHCR. On the way to the airport she talks about when she saw Grozny. She couldn’t sleep at night. She kept seeing images of the children. “It’s strange. It is so upsetting that in the same Federation, only 2 hours travel apart, families can have such extremely different lives,” she says. “One lives with stability and peace and the others just managing to survive with all the unrest and conflict.”

She also tells me how close she was and is to Vincent. The UNHCR head of office who was kidnapped. “For 11 months it was as if, for all of us, a family

member kidnapped. His wife would call every other day. She would thank us for everything we were doing to try to rescue him, and we would just feel worse because until he was released we all felt hopeless and useless. One of the hardest things was his wife gave me a sweater and jeans so he could have them when (if) he was found. I kept them in a drawer in my desk. I would be looking for paperwork. Suddenly, I would see them and it was a symbol of him still missing.” He was beaten and had to have an operation when he came out. Also, much therapy. A French journalist who was abducted at the same time recently committed suicide. Maybe it’s survivor’s guilt. But probably it is just so difficult to recover and be stable again after such trauma.

Sitting on plane once again returning to the safety of my home, my country and my son. I always feel guilty leaving because it is so easy for me. I have visited a dozen places like this. For this purpose over the last 3 years and I am aware that for all the people I have met in all their desperate situations, very little has changed. I fear that for as many families where the case got better, an equal number of family cases got worse. I know for a fact 5 of the people I spent time with are no longer alive.

I know that if thousands of people were dying every day (from hunger issues or direct murders) in California, London or New York, it would be very different. But most of these people are in places like Africa, Chechnya, the Balkans, Central Asia and Colombia, and maybe the world is used to hearing about their deaths? Is it old news? Are they too many? Or is it that they have nothing we feel to give us in return? Which is of course wrong they have everything to offer. At the end of the day what should that matter, we are equal. They are families like us. And they need our help, our support. And in areas like Chechnya: they need us not to forget.

Upon leaving, after a press conference it was said to me “You did well. I didn’t know you could be such a good politician.” I had to be. I care for all innocent people but I know if you express the needs of some you can upset others. And as always it is easy to be misinterpreted by the press.

Since my visit:

Bella camp was closed, but thanks to the mediation of UNHCR, the remaining population was not forcibly evicted and left with the only choice to return to Chechnya. Instead they were allowed to relocate to another camp, Satsita, but this added further trauma and anxiety for these repeatedly displaced Chechens. Still, it is a small victory. But what now? I wonder.

The abducted MSF worker, Arjan Erkel. He is still missing.

Tragically, direct targeting of humanitarian aid workers has continued even as I finalize this journal. Just in the last couple of months, Dr. Annalena Tonelli, Italian aid worker, was shot and killed point blank while attending her patients in Somalia (October 5). For over 25 years, she lived and worked benevolently in East Africa, where she established free health clinics. More recently

(October 27), the Red Cross/ Red Crescent office in Baghdad was attacked resulting in the deaths of 2 aid workers and 10 others passing by. I am stunned on November 16 to learn that Bettina Goislard, a 29-year old UNHCR relief worker in Ghazni, Afghanistan, has been shot to death at close range while crossing town in her well-marked UNHCR vehicle.

One final note – The UN High Commissioner for Refugees met with President Zyazikov of the Republic of Ingushetia on January 19 at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva. Dialogue continues between UNHCR, the Russian government and local authorities on issues concerning IDPs in Ingushetia – for details, please click on the dates:

[Dec. 5, 2003](#), [Dec. 9, 2003](#), [Dec. 12, 2003](#), [Jan. 20, 2004](#).

Presented here are the unedited thoughts and impressions of Ms. Jolie during and immediately following her trip. They are entirely her ideas, and do not represent the official position of UNHCR. The text and the images accompanying it may not be reproduced without Ms. Jolie's permission.
