Mr. President,

yesterday I met with members of the

Chechen Government. They discussed

the horrific conditions currently facing

their homeland. It is clear that the

Russian Government must move to immediately

allow into Chechnya and

neighboring Ingushetia an international

monitoring force to monitor

and report on the humanitarian situation.

It must also immediately move to

assist those persons who have been displaced

from Chechnya as a result of

this conflict and to allow representatives

of the international community

access to those persons in order to provide

humanitarian relief.

As many of you know, the Russian

assault on the Chechen capital Grozny

is only one more campaign in a long series

of Russian military offensives in

Chechnya. In September I expressed

my concerns to Boris Yeltsin and Putin

about the humanitarian tragedy that

was—for the second time—unfolding in

Chechnya. It is hard to imagine that

after the use of force in Chechnya from

1994–1996—which left over 80,000 civilians

dead—the Russian leadership

could again see the use of force as enhancing

the prospects for a durable settlement

to this conflict. Nonetheless,

the Russian leadership has again chosen

to use force and the current tragedy

has now reached unimaginable

heights.

Russian forces have used indiscriminate

and disproportionate force in

their bombings of civilian targets. This

has resulted in the deaths of thousands

of innocent civilians and displaced over

200,000 others. But the suffering is not

limited to Chechnya. The neighboring

province of Ingushetia has been flooded

with refugees. Mr. President, I remind

you of the recent snow storm that

swept the east coast. I need not remind

you of how it compares to a Russian

winter. A humanitarian crisis equal to

that within Chechnya itself is beginning

in Ingushetia.

I implore President Putin to hold

firm to his commitment made to the

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

Group last month to allow into

Ingushetia an international monitoring

presence to determine what is happening—

to determine the best means of

getting some immediate relief to the

refugees and those trapped in

Chechnya. And I urge the Russian Government

to lift its press restrictions so

that the citizens of the Russian Federation

see the truth for what it is. For

there is no doubt that if the people

knew the full story of human suffering

in Chechnya—on both sides of the

conflcit—they would devote every effort

to its peaceful resolution.

Russian authorities maintain a virtual

ban on access to Chechnya by

international and local journalists.

Groups—such as the Soldiers’ Mothers

Committee can only monitor Russian

casualties through their own sources,

through word of mouth, and struggle to

determine the fate of their sons in

Chechnya. In the past few weeks Russia’s

main commercial television station

was kicked out of the military’s

journalist pool for showing an interview

with a Russian military officer

describing troop losses, and Russian officials

arrested Andrei Babitsky, a 10-

year-veteran reporter for the U.S.-

sponsored Radio Liberty, who had been

reporting from the capital Grozny. The

Russian Government then exchanged

the journalist for Russian soldiers held

by Chechen rebels yet as of today, the

journalist has not been seen or hear

from.

The stories of the refugees fleeing

Chechnya are horrific: incidents of

widespread looting, summary executions,

detentions, and rape.

Three weeks ago the Russian Commander

for the North Caucasus Group

of Forces blamed Russian ‘‘mistakes’’

on their ‘‘soft-heartedness.’’ He then

ordered that only children under 10,

men over 60, and girls and women

would be considered refugees. Although

the order was eventually repealed,

teenage boys and civilian men had been

in effect sentenced to die. Orders such

as these are intolerable and must be

condemned. It is fundamentally unacceptable

to deny any civilian the right

to flee the fighting—to trap them in

this dangerous war. And where will

these trapped civilians go? Into detention

camps? No one needs to be reminded

of the systematic torture that

took place in detention camps set up to

detail Chechens in the 1994–96 Chechen

war. That event stains the memory of

the Chechen people—and its happening

again. Today adolescent boys are being

ripped from their mothers arms at the

border as they try to escape. Mothers

remain in the war zone because they

refuse to leave without their sons.

Zura, a mother of three, told human

rights monitors at the border that

guards prevented a 59-year-old man

from crossing over, and that two boys,

aged 12 and 13, made it past border

guards only by concealing themselves

on the bus. Russian leadership are obligated

under humanitarian law to do everything

to avoid civilian casualties

and allow civilians to flee to safety.

Then there are the numerous reports

of rape. In the Chechen town of Shali a

six-months pregnant 23-year-old

woman was raped and murdered. Her

mother-in-law was executed in the

same incident. And Mr. President,

many incidents of rape and sexual

abuse go unreported. For many women

in towns and villages all over Chechnya

the shame is simply too great—they

won’t come forward to report these

horrible crimes. Chechnya’s culture

and national traditions made it difficult

to document cases of rape and

sexual abuse—unmarried women who

are raped are unlikely to be able to get

married, and married women who are

raped are likely to be divorced by their

husbands. The effects of these rapes on

Chechen society will be profound and

long lasting. I remind the Russian leadership

that rape is war crime.

President Putin must move quickly

to resolve this situation in a manner

consistent with Russia’s obligations to

the international community. I urge

my colleagues to join me in full condemnation

of the use of indiscriminate

force against the civilians in Chechnya

and to remind the Russian leadership

that the world is watching. The Russian

Government must move to immediately

allow into Chechnya and

Ingushetia an international monitoring

force to determine what is happening.

It must immediately move to assist

those persons who have been displaced

from Chechnya as a result of this conflict

and to allow representatives of the

international community access to

those persons in order to provide humanitarian

relief. And the Russian

leadership must begin now to investigate

and prosecute those responsible

for human rights abuses in Chechnya—

it promised to do this after the last

Chechen War but failed to do so. Those

responsible for human rights abuses in

Chechnya must be held accountable.

President Putin must end this conflict

and must devote every effort, including

the acceptance of third party

mediation offers made months ago by

the Council of Europe and the Organization

for Security and Cooperation in

Europe, to its peaceful resolution.