Mr. President, I

rise today to once again draw attention

to the continuing war in Chechnya.

This war has raged for too long. The

war in Chechnya from 1994–1996 left

over 80,000 civilians dead, and the Foreign

Relations Committee has received

credible evidence that the current war

has again resulted in the death of thousands

of innocent civilians and the displacement

of well over 250,000 others.

The committee also received credible

evidence of widespread looting, summary

executions, detentions, denial of

safe passage to fleeing civilians, torture

and rape, committed by Russian

soldiers. Colleagues, regardless of the

politics of this war, this kind of behavior

is unacceptable. War has rules, and

the evidence and testimony the Foreign

Relations Committee received

raises serious doubts as to whether or

not the Russian Federation is playing

by those rules. Much of the evidence we

received showed clear violations of

international humanitarian law, including

the well-established Geneva

Convention.

The President must use this opportunity

to relay our serious concerns

with the actions of the Russian Government

in Chechnya. Let’s remember,

what was the Group of Seven and became

the G–8 with the inclusion of the

Russian Federation, is an association

of democratic societies with advanced

economies. Although Russia is not yet

a liberal democracy or an advanced

economy, it was invited to take part in

this group to encourage its democratic

evolution. Today as I watch Russia

refuse to initiate a political dialogue

with the Chechen people, and continue

to deny international humanitarian aid

organizations and international human

rights monitors access to Chechnya, I

must question that evolution.

I am disappointed that the Group of

Eight will not include the situation in

Chechnya on its formal agenda, but I

am hopeful that the President will

voice our serious concerns about Russia’s

conduct in Chechnya and take

concrete action to demonstrate our

concern, during bilateral talks with

President Putin.

The United States should demand

that the Russian Federation push for a

negotiated, just settlement to this conflict.

The conflict will not be resolved

by military means and the Russian

Federation should initiate immediately

a political dialogue with a

cross-section of representatives of the

Chechen people, including representatives

of the democratically elected

Chechen authorities. The United States

should remind the Russian Federation

of the requests the Council of Europe

for an immediate cease-fire and initiation

of political dialogue, and of Russia’s

obligation to that institution and

the Organization for Security and Cooperation

in Europe.

The President must also remind the

Russian Federation government of its

accountability to the international

community and take steps to demonstrate

that its conduct will effect its

standing in the world community. This

body and the U.N. Human Rights Commission

has spoken out demanding the

Russian government allow into

Chechnya humanitarian agencies and

international human rights monitors,

including U.N. Special Rapporteur, yet

the Russian government has not done

so. This body and the international

community has also demanded that the

Russian Federation undertake systematic,

credible, transparent and exhaustive

investigations into allegations of

violations of human rights and international

humanitarian law in

Chechnya, and to initiate, where appropriate,

prosecutions against those accused.

But again, the Russian Federation

has not done so.

During his meeting with President

Putin, the President is expected to discuss

economic reform in Russia and regional

stability issues. President Clinton

must relay to the Russian President

that Russia’s conduct in

Chechnya is not only a violation of

international humanitarian law, but

that it threatens Russia’s ability for

economic reform and creates instability

in the region. And President

Clinton must make clear to President

Putin that while the United States

fully supports the territorial integrity

of the Russian Federation, and is fully

aware of the evidence of grave human

rights violations committed by soldiers

on both sides of the conflict, we strongly

condemn Russia’s conduct of the war

in Chechnya and will continue to publicly

voice our opposition to it. President

Clinton should tell President

Putin that the United States will take

into consideration Russian conduct in

Chechnya in any request for further rescheduling

of Russia’s international

debt and U.S. assistance, until it allows

full and unimpeded access into

Chechnya humanitarian agencies and

international human rights monitors,

in accordance with international law.

The war in Chechnya has caused

enormous suffering for both the

Chechen and Russian people, and the

reports of the grave human rights violations

committed there, on both sides

of the conflict, continue daily. We

must raise our concerns about the war

in Chechnya at every chance and in

every forum possible, including the G–

8 Summit.

That is why I speak on the floor of

the Senate today.

I fear we have already given human

rights a back seat to economic issues

by not placing Russia’s conduct in

Chechnya on the formal agenda of the

G–8 summit, which is meeting right

now. I hope that will not be the outcome

of our bilateral talks with Russia

in Japan.

I hope the President will be firm. I

hope the President will be strong. I

hope the U.S. Government is on the

side of human rights. As a Senator

from Minnesota, I want to communicate

in the strongest possible language

that I hope Russia will do well.

My father fled persecution in Russia.

My hope is that Russia will be able to

build a democratic economy. That is

my hope for the Russian people. But I

also want to make it clear to the Russian

Federation that the conduct in

Chechnya is unacceptable, in violation

of basic international law, and that we

should be talking about and moving toward

some kind of peaceful settlement;

and, for certain, international humanitarian

agencies and human rights agencies

should have unimpeded access to

Chechnya now. Otherwise, the murder,

the rape, the torture, and the killing of

innocent people will continue. We in

the Senate should speak out on this

matter.

I yield the floor.