

# Severe Violations of Human Rights in the Transdnistrian Region of Moldova

## Statement by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and the Moldovan Helsinki Committee

*Vienna/Chisinau, 11 August 2004.* The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and the Moldovan Helsinki Committee express their concern about the lack of human rights protections in the self-proclaimed “Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR).” The Transdnistrian conflict escalated again in July when “TMR” authorities moved to close down the last eight private Moldovan/Romanian-language schools still in operation that use Latin script. Public schools in the region have to teach using the Cyrillic alphabet. The right to use Latin script is not only perceived an important sign of the right to self-identification but is also an essential prerequisite for successful studies in Moldovan/Romanian-language schools of higher education.

On 15 July armed militiamen and officers of the so-called “Ministry of National Security of TMR” forced their way into the eight schools and seized or destroyed teaching materials and other property without documenting seizures. School officials and parents were neither consulted nor informed about the measures. These schools had become private at the insistence of the “TMR” leadership, and they have had to pay rents for their premises higher than the market price for similar institutions or businesses.

The situation escalated further on 26 July after “TMR” militia seized the Moldovan orphanage in Bendery, a town situated on the left bank of the river Dniester but under control of both the Republic of Moldova and “TMR” authorities. Dozens of children were refused entry to their home and had to spend the night outdoors.

Parents, teachers and school children have maintained protective vigils in school buildings to prevent further forced seizures and closures of schools.

“These actions violate the right to education, cultural rights, and rights of the child. Moreover, the manner in which authorities have operated shows ignorance of the basic observance of the rule of law,” said Aaron Rhodes, IHF executive director. “The recent incidents in ‘TMR’ again signal total disregard by the Transdnistrian separatist

leadership for European human rights standards.”

The decision to shut down the eight schools offering education with Latin script has been but one in a series of measures to stifle political opposition in the “TMR” and is regarded by the majority of the population as another measure of ethnic and political cleansing. The “TMR,” which is not recognized by the international community, has a record of serious violations of internationally guaranteed human rights standards and democratic practices. Since the beginning of the Transdnistrian conflict in 1990, the separatist regime has not held democratic elections and has systematically violated most human rights, including the right of association, right to a fair trial, freedom from torture, and freedom of movement. In addition, “TMR” has banned activities of independent human rights organizations, defamed their members and used physical violence against them.

Most recently, the “TMR” authorities declared mobilization of its army and reservists because of an allegedly growing threat of an attack from the Republic of Moldova. The war hysteria led the Moldovan government to impose economic sanctions against “TMR,” a move to which the “TMR” reacted by declaring a blockage on rail links to the Republic of Moldova.

Transdnistrian authorities clearly show intentions to make the life of Moldovan villages on the left bank hard. Before ordering the closure of schools using Latin script, many of these had been moved to residential areas, forcing 3,000-5,000 pupils to travel additional 20-30 km to get education in Latin script.

Other repressive measures used by “TMR” authorities have included blocking telephone and road communications between the left and the right bank of the Dniester and the use of a strong electric field generator (borrowed from the 14th Army of the Russian Federation), which interferes not only with mobile communications and electronic mass media but is also feared to be harmful to the health of the local people. In addition, in the summer of 2003 “TMR” authorities turned off electricity and gas supplies to the cities of Koshnitza, Kochier’ and Molovata, as a result of which around 15,000 residents were unable to go about their basic daily duties such as cooking, store food and medicine, or get medical treatment. On 4 August 2004 another five villages on the left bank and several villages on the right bank of Dniester experienced the same fate. Two years ago “TMR” authorities cut off water supplies, electricity and heating from the Moldovan penitentiary hospital OSCH 29/8, causing serious problems to the health of 465 prisoners

held there. The blockade continues until today.

The Moldovan Helsinki Committee and the IHF call upon international and regional organizations, particularly the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Union to do their utmost to solve the long-lasting conflict and to elaborate coordinated measures to prevent any actions of the leaders of “TMR “ that breach internationally guaranteed human rights and basic freedoms. Any internationally brokered negotiations should clearly emphasize that no overt or covered support of these actions by the leaders of “TMR” are acceptable. The two organizations also appeal to the Russian Federation and Ukraine for full cooperation in any process for the resolution of the conflict.

The Moldovan Helsinki Committee and the International Helsinki Federation have repeatedly voiced their concern about human rights violation taking place in the “TMR,” including problems in the field of education. Information on these issues has been posted at [www.humanrights.md](http://www.humanrights.md) and [www.ihf-hr.org](http://www.ihf-hr.org).

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