

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY MS. MARINA LITVINOVICH,
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FOUNDATION, AT THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE OSCE
HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON VICTIMS OF TERRORISM**

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As you are aware, there have been many acts of terror in Russia over the last 10 years. The most well-known incidents are the terrorist attack on theatre hosting the Nord-Ost musical in Moscow in 2002 and the attack in Beslan in 2004. There have been other terrorist acts as well — houses with people asleep inside were blown up in Moscow and Volgodonsk, two aircraft exploded almost simultaneously in 2004, and there have been explosions on the metro, on the streets and at concerts. The considerable number of terrorist acts in Russia, the huge number of victims and persons who have suffered as a result of acts of terror, and the vulnerability of victims of terrorism made it necessary to establish the first specialized organization in Russia to deal with victims of terrorism. I head the “Aid to Victims of Terror Foundation”. Our organization is working in several areas:

1. Assistance to victims of terrorist acts through the establishment of public organizations;
2. Legal support for victims of terrorist acts;
3. Information campaigns and public relations with the media, non-governmental and political organizations;
4. Monitoring of changes in counter-terrorism legislation;
5. Monitoring of situations that spawn terrorism;
6. Charitable assistance and medical care;
7. However, the most important area of our Foundation’s work is the organization and conduct of independent investigations into acts of terrorism.

I should like to say a few words about the most important aspects of our work.

Why is the holding of independent investigations our main task? It is because the official investigations by the Russian authorities into terrorist acts are ineffective and incomplete. More accurately, in our case, the authorities do not investigate the reasons for the deaths of the hostages. Consider these figures: a total of 320 hostages died in Beslan. Around

30 of them were killed by the terrorists. Who killed the remaining 300 hostages? It is clear that the terrorists are guilty, but who is responsible for the deaths of most of the hostages — this is something that the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation does not want to investigate.

Pretty much the same thing happened in the case of the terrorist attack on the theatre hosting the Nord-Ost musical. A total of 130 hostages died there. Only five of them were killed by the terrorists. The remaining hostages were poisoned by gas and failed to receive medical attention. And once again the Office of the Prosecutor General does not want to investigate why these people died and who is responsible for their deaths. There has been no investigation because the responsibility for these deaths lies with the authorities, with the special forces and with the Federal Security Service (FSB).

It is precisely in a situation where the official investigative bodies do not want to investigate acts of terror and the reasons why people died that it falls to us — a non-governmental organization — to carry out an independent investigation. How do we do this? We collect evidence, facts, testimonies, photos and video material, and interviews with persons involved in the case. All of this material is publicly accessible on our website. Reports are prepared and expert analyses conducted; we call on specialists and experts, submit questions and appear before official inquests.

For example, together with victims we have submitted the most important material evidence to the investigators — casings of the flame-throwers fired by the Russian military when they stormed the school. We have even conducted our own re-enactment of events, to which we invited journalists and State Duma deputies (members of parliament). You will, of course, understand that we are never left in peace because on the basis of our investigations we have named the FSB and the Russian special forces as the guilty parties responsible for the deaths in Beslan.

We published a report detailing independent investigations into the terrorist attack in Beslan, and this report was confiscated by FSB personnel in Beslan. Last year I was attacked on the street in Moscow and warned not to continue doing what I do. We constantly receive telephone threats. You are probably aware of the fate of people who have conducted independent investigations into acts of terrorism in Russia, especially those acts in which the special forces and the FSB may have had a hand: State Duma deputy Yuriy Shchekochikhin died in mysterious circumstances, State Duma deputy Sergey Yushenkov was murdered, the journalist Anna Politkovskaya was murdered, the lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin is in prison and Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with polonium.

Lawyers who help victims of terrorism defend their rights also face enormous pressure. Unfortunately, in the last session there was not enough time for the victims' lawyer, Ms. Karinna Moskalenko, to speak. She would have been able to tell you all about the kind of pressure she and her colleagues experience. I find it a great pity that I am talking now about these important subjects while Ms. Irina Aleshina, the official representative of the Office of the Prosecutor General, is absent from this hall. After all, the office she represents fails to investigate acts of terror.

In addition to the actual investigations it is very important to ensure that this information reaches ordinary citizens. Censorship rules in Russia and we have no opportunity to make this information known on television or in the national newspapers. Realistically

speaking we only have the Internet; although no more than 15 per cent of the Russian population uses it. Our Foundation decided to organize a special tour of Russia to help overcome this information blockade. Together with victims of terrorist acts we travel to different towns in Russia and hold meetings where we tell people about the results of our investigations, distribute material and show films. Unfortunately, we are often refused premises for these meetings even though we are prepared to pay for them. Owners are afraid to rent out halls to us. Every time we arrive in a new region we are met by picket protests, which are organized by pro-Kremlin youth movements. They accuse us of aiding and abetting terrorists.

We try to provide legal support to victims of terrorism. However, there are difficulties here as well. The majority of lawyers refuse to take on this kind of work because it puts their lives in danger in Russia. One lawyer who used to help the victims of Beslan has since refused to continue with the case after being summoned to the FSB office on several occasions and being “given a good talking to”. Quite recently another lawyer turned down work from us after he began to receive constant threats.

Legal assistance is very important for victims since without appropriate training and education they are unable to defend themselves properly.

An important aspect of our work is public information and the organization of various events. We set up websites for organizations and investigations in order to disseminate information; we print books and brochures and distribute them. In co-operation with victims we hold memorial events, demonstrations, festivals — all of this is done to draw people’s attention to the victims of terrorist acts and their problems.

As they try to seek justice and the truth, the unfortunate victims of terrorist acts are forced to resort to such things as hunger strikes, road blocks, vandalism of the court building in Beslan, and marches. It is painful for me to speak of such things but this is how things are. The indifference shown by the courts and investigative bodies pushes the victims into this. During these difficult times we try to stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims and draw the media’s attention to their problems.

We are also involved in monitoring changes in counter-terrorism legislation. We monitor the anti-terrorism measures taken by the State and the extent to which they violate human rights. Specifically, we have spoken out against the law that abolished a fundamental democratic institution, namely the election of regional governors. We are also active in our criticism of another Russian innovation — the expanded interpretation of the terms “extremist” and “terrorist”. (For example, to my regret, I have been included in unofficial lists of extremists in Russia. What does this mean? It means that I am arrested once a month on average and detained by the police for anything between three and ten hours. This happens when I travel to different Russian towns. I am not charged with anything and then they let me go. What is more, I am constantly followed wherever I go when I travel abroad. A great many journalists and human rights activists are also “listed as extremists” and experience the same difficulties).

There is one other important task that our Foundation is involved in — the monitoring of situations that spawn terrorism. What am I referring to here? Let me give you an example. Last month three incidents occurred in Ingushetia, a republic bordering on Chechnya: Russian troops shot at and killed a group of young people on the street. These young people

were just walking along the street; they were unarmed, they hadn't killed anyone, they were just piously religious. When the friends of these young people see how their friends have been killed in broad daylight without there being any kind of trial or investigation, they become a source of new recruits to terrorism, for they want to avenge their friends. We are trying to draw public attention to these situations and to investigate them.

Of course, the problems that our organization is dealing with are specific to Russia. I would hope, however, that our experience will be useful to everyone who is or will be involved in helping victims of terrorism.