

Despite the rebels' efforts, the federalist forces succeeded in holding elections both for the Russian Duma and the head of the Chechen republic. Doku Zavgayev, Moscow's hand-picked candidate for the latter post, won 95 per cent of the vote on a reported turnout of 60 per cent. The OSCE observer mission closed its office in Grozny for the duration of the voting, contending that conditions for free and fair elections did not yet exist.

Although all population centres are ostensibly under Russian control, the recent upswing in Chechen terrorism and Russia's heavy-handed response point out the limits of Moscow's hold over the republic and the difficulties of launching a reconciliation process. Yeltsin would still like to see a peaceful solution to limit the conflict's impact on his already fading political fortunes, but with the Duma elections now concluded and in light of the latest developments, those who favour stepping up military operations may now win the upper hand in Moscow.

Prospects for a durable, peaceful settlement remain dim. Dudayev remains committed to independence, while Moscow is equally determined to keep Chechnya in the Federation. Although the OSCE team is standing by in Grozny to mediate peace talks, negotiations are not imminent. Even were they to resume and produce an accord acceptable to a majority of Chechens, die-hard rebels of the kind who have engineered the latest hostage-taking would continue to work to disrupt the restoration of civil society necessary to guarantee respect for human rights.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has deplored the bloodshed and violations of human rights that have occurred in Chechnya and urged all parties to seek a peacefully negotiated settlement. We have constantly reiterated that message, both in OSCE fora and at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. A statement from the Chair at CHR 51 deplored Russian violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Chechnya, and called on the Secretary-General to report on the issue at CHR 52. PM Chrétien raised the issue with President Yeltsin in Halifax in June, and again during his October 5 meeting in Ottawa with PM Chernomyrdin, who assured him that his government is committed to a peaceful solution. Concern over developments in Pervomaiskoe moved Minister Ouellet to issue a statement January 17 in which he urged restraint and called for the resumption of negotiations. Canada has contributed \$2.5 million in emergency humanitarian assistance, which is being distributed in Chechnya by the International Committee of the Red Cross.