



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## "Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia" Campaign against the war in Chechnya 1995

**Time period notes:** *The Committee was created in 1989, but the first actions relevant to the war in Chechnya began in January 1995.*

*Though the war continued into 1996, the actions taken by the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers were concentrated in the first half of 1995. They continued to participate in anti-war activity past June but none that they directly organized, and their organization still exists today.*

January

1995

to: June

1995

**Country:** Russia

**Location City/State/Province:** *Moscow, Russia*

**Location Description:** *Actions took place in multiple locations across Russia and crossed into Chechnya but the "Soldiers' Mothers" organizations was based in Moscow.*

**Goals:**

The primary goal of this campaign was to bring an end to the war with Chechnya but also focused on bringing Russian soldiers home to their mothers.

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 034. Vigils

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches

### **Methods in 4th segment:**

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches

### **Methods in 5th segment:**

- 006. Group or mass petitions

### **Methods in 6th segment:**

#### **Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

## **Classifications**

### **Classification:**

Change

### **Cluster:**

Human Rights

Peace

### **Group characterization:**

- mothers
- women's group

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

### **Leaders:**

Maria Kirbasova

### **Partners:**

not known

### **External allies:**

not known

### **Involvement of social elites:**

Anatoli Shabas, who was in the Russian Parliament, was known for trying to raise awareness of the atrocities being committed in the war.

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

### **Groups in 1st Segment:**

### **Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Buddhists

### **Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Chechen Women
- Clergy of various religions

### **Groups in 4th Segment:**

### **Groups in 5th Segment:**

### **Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 1 month

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

### **Opponents:**

Russian military and government.

### **Campaigner violence:**

not known

### **Repressive Violence:**

not known

## **Success Outcome**

### **Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

3 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

### **Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

### **Notes on outcomes:**

It is difficult to assess outcomes, but the Mothers of Soldiers did succeed in liberating some soldiers from the military and increased Russian opposition to the war, which arguably was the important pressure leading to the end of the first Chechnyan war.

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The ‘Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia’(CSM) was formed in 1989 as an organized response to the mistreatment of Russian soldiers during times of war and forced military service for young men who were still in school. Early activity of the CSM’s led to the return of 17,600 men a year earlier than expected from military service. Their organization, led by Maria Kirbasova, continues to oppose war and fight for better treatment of soldiers even today. Their most notable actions were taken in the earlier half of the first Chechen War, namely the “March of Parental Compassion.”

In November of 1994 Russia and Chechnya went to war over Chechnya’s independence from Russia. The Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers decided to oppose the war.

On January 3rd 1995 their first anti-war vigil was held on Red-Square to commemorate those who had passed away in Chechnya. On the 6th a group of organized parents lead by Maria Kirbasova went into a Chechen military zone in Grozny and stayed there until February 7th, confronting and negotiating with Russian military commanders. The parents’ intervention in the war zone resulted in dozens of soldiers being released.

Towards the end of February a week of small anti-war actions were carried out by various groups including the CSM. On the

20th a group of fifteen people, including robed Buddhists as well as soldiers' mothers held a one hour anti-war vigil while holding hand-painted signs in Oktyabrskaya Ploshchad, Moscow. The group was outnumbered by the press and police. Undiscouraged, on February 25th and 26th, the Committee held a conference called "For life and Freedom" where close to 200 participants gathered to discuss the war and the movement against it.

On March 8th in Moscow CSM's held an anti-war gathering during which poetry was read, speeches were given, flower offerings were made in memory of those who had died, pledges to nonviolence were made and their demands in regards to the war were clarified and re-stated.

Following this gathering the "March of Parental Compassion" (also called "March of Mothers' Compassion") was started. The regional representatives of the committee both planned and participated in the action. They were joined by Buddhist monks in ceremonial robes and wished luck by various other religious leaders, including a Muslim and a Jewish rabbi. The participants planned to march from the Kremlin Wall in Moscow all the way to the militarized zone in Grozny where they hoped to obtain information and negotiate for the release of Russian soldiers while raising awareness of the atrocities committed in the war. Along their route, the 100 women carried posters reading "The war in Chechnya is a shame" and "Bring our sons home." They also collected signatures on a petition against their government's war.

The march was stopped on March 18th when the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs checked the documents of all participants and threatened to stop the march indefinitely. They were allowed to leave by train after a short delay but were delayed again when removed from the train by local authorities.

They were then told they would be taken to Nazran, on their route, by bus, but instead were taken to a Russian military base. After much insistence they were eventually transported to Nazran and the marchers continued on their journey.

On March 23 they marched to Nalchik and added roughly 300 people there. With the marchers, humanitarian aid was delivered and there was planned negotiation between the CSM's leaders and representatives of both Chechnya and Russia.

In April the mothers, having gained more numbers, made their way to Sleptsovsk on the Chechen border but were stopped by Russian troops who were instructed not to let anyone pass. They changed route and took side streets to the small town of Sernovodsk, which is another Chechen town right near the boarder where they were welcomed by the Chechen women there and offered a traditional Russia welcoming. The mothers tried to help survivors of a massacre in Samashki, but because only Chechen women were allowed in and out of the area, the Russian soldiers' mothers had to wait at the checkpoint where those survivors could come through.

On April 12th Anatoli Shabad, a Russian member of parliament entered Samashki with a bus full of women and witnessed the way the war had torn the town apart. He then reported what he had seen in a press conference in an attempt to shed real light on what was taking place in the war.

On April 16th the Committee wrote a statement about the atrocities they had witnessed in Samashki which was then read on television. The statement described in detail their observations, including the killing of women and children.

A counter statement was released by Stanislav Govorukhin stating that the claims being made by the CSM's were over-dramatizations and that many of the events reported had not happened.

On April 21st the march continued as members from the CSM, Chechen mothers, Buddhist Monks, and Quakers marched through Grozny demanding peace.

In May, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers took part on the launching of a petition to allow draftees to fulfill their military obligations by doing civilian service work.

That marked the end of the direct action phase of the Committee, although it continued to work through the remainder of the war through education, networking, and support of other anti war groups and ideas. The war ended in August of 1996. It is difficult

to estimate the impact the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers had in their short 1995 direct action campaign, but the nature of their actions won them wide credibility, reflected in their being awarded the 1995 Sean MacBride Peace Prize and the 1996 Right Livelihood Award.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers may have influenced other mother-based groups towards the middle of their campaign such as "Mothers against Silence of Israel" and "Mothers' Front of Sri Lanka" (2)

### Sources:

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[1] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-women>