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RUSSIA: MEN SUSPECTED GAY ABDUCTED, TORTURED OR KILLED

Men believed to be gay are being abducted, tortured or even killed in Chechnya as part of a coordinated campaign with impunity.

On 1 April, the Russian independent daily newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, reported that over one hundred men believed to be gay have been abducted in recent days, as part of a coordinated campaign. The men were reportedly tortured and otherwise ill-treated, and forced to disclose other LGBTI individuals known to them. Novaya Gazeta claimed to have verified information about at least three men who had been killed by their captors, but its sources claim that there have been many more killings.

There are reports that some of the abducted men have since been returned to their families, possibly because their sexual orientation was not confirmed by their captors. However, they remain in grave danger because of local homophobic intolerance. Members of the NGO Russian LGBTI network have confirmed this information, and have created a hotline offering help to those who may be looking for safety outside the region.

Reactions from Chechen officials to this information has varied from denial (for instance, by Alvi Karimov, the Press Secretary of the Head of the Republic), to dismissing it as joke, to further thinly veiled threats. On 3 April the press secretary of the Russian Presidential Administration, Dmitry Peskov, announced that the Ministry of Interior was "checking information about the alleged persecution of men of non-traditional orientation".

Please send a letter, fax, and/or email in Russian or English without delay. (Postage is \$2.50.)

- * Urge them to carry out prompt, effective and thorough investigations into the reports of abductions and killings of men believed to be gay in Chechnya and to ensure that anyone found guilty or complicit in such crimes will be brought to justice in accordance with the laws of the Russian Federation.
- * Call on them to take all necessary steps to ensure safety of any individual who may be at risk in Chechnya because of their sexual orientation and to condemn in the strongest terms possible any discriminatory comments made by officials.
- * Remind the Russian and Chechen authorities that they have an international human rights obligation to prohibit discrimination and to investigate and prosecute hate crimes, the most invidious form of discrimination.

Address your messages to

Chairman of the Investigation Committee

Aleksandr Ivanovich Bastrykin

Investigation Committee of the Russian Federation

Tekhnicheskii pereulok, dom 2

105005 Moscow, Russian Federation

Fax: 011 7 495 966 97 76

Online submissions (in Russian):

http://sledcom.ru/references/Organizacija_priema_grazhdan#reception

Salutation: Dear Chairman

Acting Head of the Investigation Committee for the Chechen Republic

Sergei Vasilievich Sokolov

Ul. Altaiskaya d.3,

Grozny,

364000 Chechen Republic, Russian Federation

Fax: 011 7 8712 62 41 01

Email: ip-chechen@sledcom.ru

Online submissions: <http://chr.sledcom.ru/references>

Salutation: Dear Acting Head

Please send copies to both

His Excellency Alexander Darchiev

Ambassador for the Russian Federation

285 Charlotte Street

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8L5

Fax: (613) 236-6342

Email: info@rusembassy.ca

Human Rights Ombudsman of the Russian Federation

Tatiana Nikolaevna Moskalkova

ul. Miasnitskaia, 47

107084, Moscow

Russian Federation

Fax: 011 7 495 607 7470 / 011 7 495 607 3977

(If you'd like to check if fax received: 011 7 495 607 1854)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

“Honour killings” are still practiced in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya. Men who may be seen as having “tarnished” the family’s “honour”, by being gay or believed to be gay, face a very real risk of being killed by members of their own families. Perpetrators of “honour killings” often enjoy impunity for their crimes. A number of violent videos have been published recently on the internet which threaten gay activists.

Kheda Saratova, a member of the Human Rights Council under the Head of Chechnya, first commented that Chechen society and Chechnya’s “whole justice system” would treat anyone who kills a gay relative “with understanding”. She later claimed that she had been misunderstood and that the revelation that there were gay men in Chechnya had shocked her so much that she was unable to think clearly.

The Chechen authorities, headed by Ramzan Kadyrov, effectively control virtually every sphere of life in this North Caucasus republic in the Russia Federation. Any form of dissent is brutally suppressed, and human rights defenders, media workers and political activists, including those from outside Chechnya, as well as, on rare occasions, members of the general public who express any form of criticism of the Chechen leadership and its policies, face threats, harassment and often physical violence

(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/3255/2016/en/>). The assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 and the abduction and murder of Chechen human rights defender Natalia Estemirova in 2009 were preceded by similar threats.