

UPDATE FROM ILGA-EUROPE:

Novaya Gazeta Report on Arbitrary Detention of Gay Men in Chechnya

On 1 April 2017, Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, published [an article](#) reporting arbitrary detention, torture and extra judicial killing of (perceived) gay and bisexual men in Chechnya on a mass scale. ILGA-Europe were gravely concerned to read this report and has been working to determine the facts of the situation and identify the most helpful response to support victims.

Conditions for LGBT people in Chechnya, Russian Federation.

There have been reports of violence and persecution of LGBT people in Chechnya in the past. This is a region with strong traditional religious and cultural customs. Gay men (or those perceived to be gay) being banished or murdered by family members (in so-called 'honour killings') has been an ongoing issue in the region. However, attacks on men with so-called 'non-traditional' sexual orientations have not been consistently reported before, and where they have they have not been on the scale reported by *Novaya Gazeta* this past weekend.

Due to the nature of the overall human rights situation in the region, and the bleak outlook for LGBT people even prior to this crisis, it is incredibly difficult to reach out to victims, monitor and document what is happening on the ground. However, the Russian LGBT Network has been able to verify that a concerted effort to target, imprison and torture gay and bisexual men is taking place via a number of sources, including survivors, witnesses, friends and family of victims, and journalists.

According to sources from the North Caucasus to date, over 100 have been detained for arbitrary reasons in unofficial prisons, where victims are being tortured by electric current, cruelly beaten, and forced to disclose personal contacts of other gay men in Chechnya. The Russian LGBT Network can confirm at least 3 murders so far – out of a reported 20 murders.

Response from civil society

The Russian LGBT Network has set up a 24-hour confidential hotline to collect further data, reach victims and arrange evacuation support for victims. 20 calls been received, and evacuations of a number of people are in process.

Response of the authority

Official statements of Chechen leaders are a clear incitement to hatred. The leader of the Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, responded to claims of arrests of gay and bisexual men to Interfax news agency with the following statement: *"You cannot detain and persecute people who simply do not exist in the republic. If there were such people in Chechnya, the law-enforcement organs wouldn't need to have anything to do with them because their relatives would send them somewhere from which there is no returning."*

Similarly Kheda Saratova, a member of the human rights council of Chechnya, told a Russian radio station: *“in our Chechen society, any person who respects our traditions and culture will hunt down this kind of person without any help from authorities, and do everything to make sure that this kind of person does not exist in our society”*.

Follow-up action

The Russian LGBT Network reports that, according to information at their disposal, due to the attention drawn to the situation by the Novaya Gazeta article, murders of those detained have been suspended, indicating that international pressure is helpful to the situation. However, many remain detained, facing torture and inhumane treatment in horrific conditions.

Call for action

Support from the international community for an immediate halt, release of those detained, and proper investigation of the arbitrary detention, torture and extra judicial killing of (perceived) gay and bisexual men in Chechnya is needed.

We strongly urge international institutions, governments and other relevant actors to use any means they have to defend victims of detentions. Including by;

- putting pressure on the highest levels of Russian authorities to end these horrific abuses of the human rights of gay and bisexual men,
- encouraging urgent release of victims from illegal detention camps, where they live in terrible conditions, being subjected to brutal beatings and torture,
- and coordinating closely with actors working on the ground to determine other appropriate responses.

The **Russian LGBT Network** can be called for free in Russia - **8 800 555 73 74**.

Anyone outside Russia with information they would like to share on the current situation in Chechnya can **confidentially contact ILGA-Europe** Tel.: +32 2 609 54 10 or info@ilga-europe.org