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# Torture: Human rights groups raise alarm over ‘purge’ of gay people in Chechnya

Sunday 16 April 2017, by [CHAN Sewell](#), [DUFFY Nick](#), [MILLIKEN Alice](#) (Date first published: 13 April 2017).

**Reports that authorities in Chechnya have been rounding up gay people have been verified by human rights groups.**

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Early reports emerged last week that gay people are being targeted in the region [1], which is part of Russia but has substantial autonomy.

Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* reported that more than 100 gay men had been detained in the last two weeks “in connection with their non-traditional sexual orientation, or suspicion of such” as part of a purge.

Several people were also reportedly feared dead following violent raids.

There was initially little verification of the claims from the remote region, which is largely closed off from the centre of Russia.

However the reports have now been separately confirmed by Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, both of which cite on-the-ground sources that appear to confirm gay men have been targeted for detention.

In its report, HRW confirmed [2]: “The information published by *Novaya Gazeta* is consistent with the reports Human Rights Watch recently received from numerous trusted sources, including sources on the ground.

“The number of sources and the consistency of the stories leaves us with no doubt that these devastating developments have indeed occurred.”

Ekaterina L. Sokiryanskaya, Russia project coordinator for the International Crisis Group, told the *New York Times*: “I got numerous, numerous signals... it came from too many sources not to be true.”

“Even delivering the information is very difficult... they are just small islands, isolated.” According to HRW, LGBT Network in Russia opened a special hotline to provide emergency support to those who find themselves in immediate danger [see article below].

A spokesman for the Chechen government, Alvi Karimov, previously denied the reports while claiming that gay people haven't been targeted because "you can't detain and harass someone who doesn't exist in the republic".

They said: "If there were such people in the Chechen republic, law enforcement wouldn't have a problem with them because their relatives would send them to a place of no return."

A spokesperson for the Kremlin denied any knowledge of a purge but claimed the Russian government would "investigate" the reports.

In the UK, activists have written to Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, calling for the British government to intervene in the crisis.

The letter, signed by Pride in London's Michael Salter and Alison Camps said: "Pride in London is alarmed to learn that authorities in the Russian republic of Chechnya have launched a campaign to identify and execute members of the LGBT+ community within the quasi-independent state, formally under Russian control.

"Pride in London would urge the UK Government to take meaningful steps to assist the LGBT+ community in Chechnya and to offer protection and support to what amounts to state sponsored genocide.

"The statements issued by the authorities in Chechnya, that LGBT+ citizens do not exist in the state, are a chilling indictment to the goals of an extermination agenda rather than that of fact."

The Foreign Office responded to the pressure, telling BuzzFeed: "We are very concerned by reports of mass arrests of individuals in Chechnya due to their perceived or actual sexual orientation. We condemn any and all persecution.

"The human rights situation for LGBT people in Russia has deteriorated significantly in recent years and we have voiced our serious concern over these developments with Russian authorities at all levels."

**Nick Duffy**

\* Pink News. 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017, 4:50 PM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/04/04/human-rights-groups-raise-alarm-over-purge-of-gay-people-in-chechnya/>

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## **STATEMENT OF THE RUSSIAN LGBT NETWORK'S BOARD**

### **STATEMENT OF THE RUSSIAN LGBT NETWORK'S BOARD REGARDING THE INFORMATION ON THE KIDNAPPINGS AND MURDERS OF LGBT PEOPLE IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

The Russian LGBT Networks is highly disturbed and concerned about the information on the kidnapping and killing of people in Chechnya because of their sexual orientation. We are also outraged by the reaction of the officials of the Chechen Republic, who in fact justify the killings. No

national and/or religious traditions and norms can justify kidnapping or killing of a human being. Any references to “traditions” to justify kidnappings and killings are amoral and criminal.

The Russian LGBT Network makes every effort to contact the victims and to provide the emergency support. Taking into account the recent statements of the Chechnya officials, we believe that the only thing that can work out is the evacuation. We cooperate closely with the human rights defenders both in Russia and abroad, and ready to evacuate.

On Monday, the Russian LGBT Network will appeal to the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation with two claims. The one is the demand to investigate the information on the crimes, published in “Novaya Gazeta”. Another one is the claim to check whether the public statements of the Chechen officials made on April 1 and justifying the killings, contain the elements of the offence.

We are grateful to everyone who contacted us and asked how they can help. What do we need now?

- Help us to spread the information about the fact that the Russian LGBT Network is ready to evacuate people. Please think for whom this information can be useful. You can spread the information publicly or personally. Everyone who needs help can contact us by email or call the Hotline (8 800 555 73 74). The call is free all over Russia.
- In accordance with the Russian legislation, every citizen can apply to the Investigative Committee with the demand to investigate the information about the crime published in mass media. We encourage everyone to apply (the template of the claim will be published tomorrow).

We understand that many people want to help those in need. But please remember that any uncoordinated actions can put in additional danger people in need and those who are ready to help. Therefore, we do not recommend to collect the addresses of people who are ready to provide temporarily shelter.

Be aware, that the situation with the human rights in the North Caucasus is truly difficult. Now people's lives are endangered and the only way to help is the evacuation. The Russian LGBT Network has the necessary resources to evacuate people, there is a team that already makes every effort to save lives. That is why we ask everyone to share with us the information about people in need and any offers of assistance.

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<https://lgbtnet.org/en/content/statement-russian-lgbt-networks-board-regarding-information-kidnappings-and-murders-lgbt>

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## **U.N. Experts Condemn Killing and Torture of Gay Men in Chechnya**

LONDON — United Nations experts demanded on Thursday that Chechnya halt the abduction, detention, beating and killing of gay and bisexual men, after weeks of reports about violent repression there.

“These are acts of persecution and violence on an unprecedented scale in the region and constitute serious violations of the obligations of the Russian Federation under international human rights

law,” the experts, a panel of five that advises the United Nations Human Rights Council, said in a statement [3].

The experts noted that much of the abuse was reported to have taken place at an unofficial detention center near Argun, a town about 10 miles east of Grozny, the Chechen capital.

“The arrested men are subjected to physical and verbal abuse, torture including with electric shocks, beatings, insults and humiliations,” the experts wrote. “They are forced to give contact details of other gay people and threatened with having their sexual orientation disclosed to their family and community — a move which could put them at risk of ‘honor killings.’”

Since last month, reports have circulated within Russia that local militias and security forces have been hunting down, detaining and abusing men they perceived to be gay or bisexual. On April 1, a leading opposition newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, confirmed those reports, citing Russian federal law enforcement officials, who blamed the local authorities.

Dozens of men are said to have been rounded up, but precise numbers — including a death toll — are not available.

Since 2007, Chechnya — a mountainous republic within the Russian Federation and the site of a long-running insurgency that Russia eventually crushed — has been led by a strongman, Ramzan A. Kadyrov, who has been granted significant leeway in exchange for his allegiance to the Kremlin.

In restive Muslim regions in southern Russia, Mr. Putin has empowered local leaders to enforce their interpretation of traditional Muslim values, partly in an effort to co-opt Islamist extremism, which has largely been driven underground.

A spokesman for Mr. Kadyrov issued a chilling denial on April 1, after the initial reports surfaced. “You cannot arrest or repress people who just don’t exist in the republic,” the spokesman, Alvi Karimov, told the Interfax news agency. “If such people existed in Chechnya, law enforcement would not have to worry about them, as their own relatives would have sent them to where they could never return.”

The Kremlin’s spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said on April 3 that he could not confirm the newspaper’s account but added: “This is something for law enforcement to deal with. This is not on the Kremlin’s agenda.”

According to *Novaya Gazeta* [4], the persecution intensified after a group based in Moscow, GayRussia.ru, applied for permits to stage gay-pride parades in four cities in the North Caucasus region.

The group did not apply for a permit in Chechnya, but it did in another Muslim area in the region, Kabardino-Balkaria. The mere application there — denied, as usual — prompted an anti-gay counterdemonstration.

“In Chechnya, the command was given for a ‘prophylactic sweep,’ and it went as far as real murders,” *Novaya Gazeta* reported. As part of the sweep, investigators posed as men looking for dates or sex. Gay men have begun deleting online accounts or even fleeing the region, the newspaper reported.

The United Nations experts urged the authorities to end the persecution, saying that Chechens were “living in a climate of fear fueled by homophobic speeches by local authorities.” They also demanded that the authorities immediately release all detainees, thoroughly investigate the anti-gay campaign

and hold the persecutors accountable.

The experts condemned statements by Chechen officials suggesting that gay people should be hunted down and killed. “The Russian Federation must officially state that it does not tolerate any form of incitement to violence, social stigmatization of homosexuality or hate speech, and does not condone discrimination or violence against people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity,” their statement said.

There was little suggestion that Moscow would give the experts’ warnings much heed. Russia has been widely criticized for cracking down on the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. In 2013, a law criminalized giving minors materials promoting “nontraditional” sexual relationships — a statute that has been used to justify the arrests of gay rights activists.

The experts are Vitit Muntarbhorn of Thailand, who focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity; Sètonджи Roland Adjovi of Benin, an expert on arbitrary detention; Agnès Callamard of France, an authority on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Nils Melzer of Switzerland, who focuses on torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment; and David Kaye of the United States, a specialist in freedom of opinion and expression.

## **Sewell Chan**

*Follow Sewell Chan on Twitter @sewellchan.*

Oleg Matsnev contributed reporting from Moscow.

A version of this article appears in print on April 14, 2017, on Page A6 of the New York edition with the headline: U.N. Advisers Urge a Stop To Repression In Chechnya. Order Reprints| Today's Paper|Subscribe

\* The New York Times. APRIL 13, 2017:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/world/europe/un-chechnya-gay-men-killing-abuse.html>

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## **50 Members of Congress sign letter condemning anti-gay purge in Chechnya**

**50 members of the United States Congress have signed a letter calling for an investigation into a homophobic purge in Chechnya.**

Russian opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* broke the news earlier this month that more than 100 gay men have been detained in Chechnya “in connection with their non-traditional sexual orientation”.

The disturbing reports, since corroborated by human rights groups, also alleged that the men are being held in secret concentration camp-style prisons where they face torture and abuse.

Chechnya is part of Russia but has substantial autonomy.

In response to the crisis, 50 Members of Congress this week signed a letter urging Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to speak out publicly against these reports and to pressure the Russian

government to investigate and stop the violence and arrests.

Secretary Tillerson is currently on a trip to Russia. As he travelled to the Kremlin without a press pool, it is unclear whether he raised the issue.

“The situation in Chechnya is horrific,” said LGBT Equality Caucus Co-Chair Rep. David N. Cicilline (RI-01). “Chechen authorities are acting in clear violation of international law. Secretary Tillerson needs to clearly condemn these actions during his visit to Moscow. These abuses cannot be tolerated.”

“These reports coming out of Chechnya regarding the targeted arrests and murders of gay men are appalling,” said LGBT Equality Caucus Vice-Chair Rep. Alan Lowenthal (CA-47).

“The most fundamental internationally-accepted human rights are the right to life, liberty, and security of person. I stand with the LGBT community in the Chechen Republic, and I call on Secretary Tillerson to denounce these atrocities and I call on the Russian and Chechen authorities to immediately halt these arrests and prosecute those who have tortured and murdered innocent people”.

The ‘bi-partisan’ letter was signed by 47 Democrats. The only Republicans to sign were Carlos Curbelo, Charles Dent and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Elsewhere today a number of the UN’s most senior experts on human rights called for action against the purge.

“We urge the authorities to put an end to the persecution of people perceived to be gay or bisexual in the Chechen Republic who are living in a climate of fear fuelled by homophobic speeches by local authorities,” the experts stated.

“It is crucial that reports of abductions, unlawful detentions, torture, beatings and killings of men perceived to be gay or bisexual are investigated thoroughly,” they added.

“These are acts of persecution and violence on an unprecedented scale in the region, and constitute serious violations of the obligations of the Russian Federation under international human rights law,” the experts said.

UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has also condemned the purge.

Mr Johnson tweeted: “Outrageous Chechnya govt supports rather than stops ill-treatment of #LGBT people. Completely agree w/ [junior Foreign Office minister] Joyce Anelay”.

In a previous statement to PinkNews, Baroness Anelay called on Russia to investigate the mass detention of gay men in Chechnya and ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice.

Baroness Anelay said: “The detention and ill-treatment of over 100 gay men in Chechnya is extremely concerning. Reports have also suggested that at least three of these men have been killed.

“The statement by the regional Government, implying that such treatment towards LGBT people is acceptable, is particularly abhorrent. We condemn any and all persecution, and call on the authorities to promptly investigate and ensure that perpetrators of human rights abuses are brought to justice.

“The human rights situation for LGBT people in Russia has deteriorated significantly in recent years and we continue to voice our serious concern with Russian authorities at all levels.

“Russia’s international human rights obligations require them to protect citizens who may be at risk of persecution. We expect the Russian government to fulfil its obligations to this end, and to uphold the rule of law.”

Mr Johnson’s comments come after Liberal Democrat leader questioned his continued silence on the issue.

Commenting on reports that Chechnya has opened concentration camps for gay men, Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron said: “These reports from Chechnya are truly horrifying, and represent an extreme manifestation of increasing homophobic brutality and intolerance in Putin’s Russia.

“The UK government must strongly condemn this disgusting violence, and use every possibly opportunity to raise this with the Russian government, as well as in the UN and other international bodies.

“The UK must work with those who share our values to stop the mindless targeting of the LGBT community, which is still prevalent in too many countries across the world.

“Only through defending universal human rights will we ever hope to achieve a world in which every person can live, work and flourish without discrimination.

“It is disappointing that Boris Johnson has failed to stand up for these people by not visiting Russia after Trump told him to stay at home.”

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson hastily cancelled a planned visit to Russia this month so that Trump’s Secretary of State Rex Tillerson could make a trip.

Mr Tillerson travelled to the Kremlin without a press pool, and it is unclear whether he raised the issue.

Related: Journalist who broke news of Chechnya’s gay purge forced into hiding after ‘jihad’ death threats

**Nick Duffy**

\* Pink News. 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017, 5:27 PM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/04/13/50-members-of-congress-sign-letter-condemning-anti-gay-purge-in-chechnya/>

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## **Hundreds of LGBT activists protest against ‘gay concentration camps’ in Chechnya**

Hundreds of LGBT activists gathered outside the Russian Embassy in London yesterday to protest the detention of gay men in ‘concentration camps’ in Chechnya.

They carried placards saying “LGBT+ rights are human rights,” “Queer lives matter, close the camps” and a tuba demanding that Prime Minister Theresa May speak out against concentration camps.

Lord Waheed Alli, UK’s first gay peer, told *PinkNews* he wrote to over 300 MPs and colleagues.

He called on them to pressure the UN to investigate what has been happening in the region.

"I want to make sure that on Tuesday, when parliament comes back, this is an important issue for the elected and the unelected house."

He also emphasised importance of showing up in the streets, "When you hear the stories of concentration camps and gay men being rounded up and beaten tortured and killed, it's the responsibility of everyone to come out and say 'we don't accept that behaviour, we won't tolerate concentration camps.'"

Usmann, a law student from Pakistan said, "We all need to use whatever safe spaces in the world we have in order to march behind those who cannot speak for themselves. We don't want another state to think 'oh the Chechens got away with it.'"

Mohammed Ali is a Bangladeshi student added that he hoped this protest would show President Valdimir Putin that the people of the world are standing up against the persecution of gay people.

Steve Taylor, communications director for the European Pride Organisers Association and one of the organisers of the event said they initially hoped that 200 people might attend the protest.

The crowd reached capacity on the pavement outside the Embassy well before the event was scheduled to begin.

By the time pink flowers were laid in front of the Embassy, protesters occupied both sides of Bayswater Road.

Russian opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* broke the news earlier this month that more than 100 gay men have been detained in Chechnya "in connection with their non-traditional sexual orientation".

Chechen government spokesman Alvi Karimov previously denied the claims of the detention of gay men saying, "you can't detain and harass someone who doesn't exist in the republic."

"If there were such people in the Chechen republic, law enforcement wouldn't have a problem with them because their relatives would send them to a place of no return."

A spokesperson for the Kremlin denied any knowledge of a purge but claimed the Russian government would "investigate" the reports.

The disturbing reports, since corroborated by human rights groups, alleged that the men are being held in secret 'concentration camp'-style prisons where they face torture and abuse.

Three men who fled the region shared their personal accounts with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Russian Service earlier this week.

**Alice Milliken**

\* 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017, 6:14 PM:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/04/13/hundreds-of-lgbt-activists-protest-against-gay-concentration-camps-in-chechnya/>



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## Footnotes

- [1] <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/04/02/gay-men-reportedly-detained-and-killed-by-chechnya-authorities/>
- [2] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/04/anti-lgbt-violence-chechnya>
- [3] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx>
- [4] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/world/europe/chechen-authorities-arresting-and-killing-gay-men-russian-paper-says.html>