

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



12th April 2017

Fiona Hyslop MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Men thought to be gay abducted, tortured or killed in Chechnya

On 1st April, the Russian independent daily newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, reported that hundreds of men, believed by the Chechen state to be gay, have been abducted in recent days, as part of a coordinated campaign of state-sponsored homophobia.

Information circulating widely in the British general and LGBT media reports that the men have been tortured, forced to disclose other LGBT individuals known to them, their families extorted, and in three cases, verified by Novaya Gazeta, men have been murdered by their captors. Other sources say that as many as twenty men may have been killed.

We are in contact with the Russian LGBT Network, who have confirmed this information. They are offering support to men who have fled the region, and have created a hotline to help those who may be looking for safety.

Svetlana Zakharova, from the Russian LGBT Network, reported to the media: "Gay people have been detained and rounded up and we are working to evacuate people from the camps and some have now left the region."

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“Those who have escaped said they are detained in the same room and people are kept altogether, around 30 or 40. They are tortured with electric currents and heavily beaten, sometimes to death.”

In an email to the Equality Network, she added, “We believe that all kinds of international pressure is a good thing. People are being killed and there is still no investigation.”

Amnesty International reports that reactions from Chechen officials to this information have varied from denial (for instance, by Alvi Karimov, the Press Secretary of the Head of the Chechen Republic) to dismissing it as a joke.

On 3rd April, the press secretary of the Russian Presidential Administration, Dimitry Peskov, announced that the Russian Ministry of Interior were “checking information about the alleged persecution of men of non-traditional orientation”.

These reports are not only deeply disturbing and concerning, but have rightly led to calls from the LGBTI community in Scotland and elsewhere for international condemnation, and for pressure to be put on the Chechen and Russian authorities.

The Equality Network supports Amnesty International’s calls for people to contact the Russian and Chechen authorities:

- Urging 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;
- Urging them to take all necessary steps to ensure the 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;
- Reminding 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.

We are therefore requesting that the Scottish Government make urgent representations to the UK Government, asking them to use available diplomatic channels to pressure the Chechen authorities to end their activities against men thought to be gay.

We also ask the Scottish Government to release a statement condemning these actions of the Chechen authorities. This is something that the Russian LGBT Network have asked other governments to do.

We will also be calling for the Scottish cities and towns that are twinned with Russian counterparts (Perth, Glasgow, and Coatbridge) to make urgent representations to their twins, urging action from the Russian Government.

We feel strongly that Scotland cannot remain silent while grave violations of human rights take place within the borders of another country, and we trust that the Scottish Government agree.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S Cuthbertson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott Cuthbertson
Development Manager
Equality Network

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Naomi McAuliffe'.

Naomi McAuliffe
Programme Director - Scotland
Amnesty International