

António Guterres

United Nations Secretary General

United Nations Secretariat

405 East 42nd Street,

New York, NY, 10017

April 14, 2017

Re: The Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Murder of Gay Men in Chechnya

Dear Secretary-General,

OutRight Action International and Human Rights Watch, both founding members of the UN LGBT Core Group, together with ILGA Europe and the Russian LGBT Network are writing to you to urgently appeal for your intervention in the appalling situation in Chechnya. As you know, in recent weeks up to 100 gay and bisexual men (and those perceived as such) in Chechnya have been subject to detention, enforced disappearances, torture and, in some cases, murder sanctioned by local authorities in Chechnya.

We urge you and your senior staff to contact the Russian mission to the United Nations and senior Russian government officials in Moscow and appeal to the Russian government to:

- End these horrific violations against men who maybe or are perceived to be gay and bisexual,
- Take measures to secure the urgent release of all detainees held in illegal detention camps, in terrible conditions, subjected to brutal beatings and other forms of torture
- Provide practical support for men who have been illegally detained, including facilitating their relocation outside of Chechnya where possible; and
- Ensure there is an effective investigation that can lead to accountability for the violations, including a remedy for the victims.

We have been working closely with ILGA Europe to ensure that accurate information on the situation in Chechnya is expedited to UN mission representatives and UN representatives in New York and Geneva. We attach a briefing from ILGA Europe for your information.¹

Over the past two weeks a coalition of civil society organizations have requested immediate engagement of stakeholders across the UN system including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the New York UN LGBT Core Group, UN agencies and

¹ Annex 1.

relevant mandate holders, including on arbitrary detention, cultural rights, health, summary executions, torture, and sexual orientation and gender identity. A subsequent statement from the Office of The High Commissioner on Human Rights was released on April 13th.²

We understand that the public attention the persecution of gay and bisexual men has received over the past week, may have the effect of preventing the murder and torture of some of the victims and halt arbitrary detention of new victims, but gay and bisexual men (& those perceived as such) still remain at great risk in Chechnya.

We look forward to your response, and are available to discuss the issue further.

Sincerely,

OutRight Action International

Human Rights Watch

ILGA-Europe

The Russian LGBT Network

² Annex 2

Annex 1.

Latest information from Chechnya – 13 April 2017

Since ILGA-Europe's previous update on the alarming situation of arbitrary detention, torture and killing of (perceived) gay men in Chechnya, there has been a concerted effort to document facts of the situation. The Russian LGBT Network has driven this fact-finding mission, while simultaneously continuing to evacuate survivors from the region and solicit international support. The overall aim of all these activities is to put pressure on the highest level of Russian authorities so that these atrocities are immediately halted and investigated and that those detained can be freed.

News of the situation in Chechnya has spread far, and the reactions of support from across the globe have been encouraging. (See a list of public statements [here](#).)

The arbitrary detention of men based on their (perceived) sexual orientation is continuing, almost two weeks after the news reached international attention. In spite of the global outcry, no action has been taken, either on the part of the Russian or Chechen authorities, to release those detained.

According to the latest information received by the Russian LGBT Network from a survivor, the NGO believes that the second suspected prison at Tsotsi-Yurt, previously reported by *Svoboda*, does exist. Survivors have also expressed fears that the social media accounts of (perceived) gay and bisexual men are being targeted, hacked and used to contact other men who have not yet been arrested.

The Russian LGBT Network continues to receive requests for emergency assistance, although the NGO has not been able to maintain contact with several survivors. This unexplained loss of contact is a clear cause for concern.

Information from *Novaya Gazeta*

New information about the conditions faced by those detained has since been collected and published by *Novaya Gazeta* (the independent newspaper which broke the story on 1 April).

Read the follow-up article in Russian [here](#) (warning: article contains graphic images, an unofficial translation of the article can be viewed [here](#)).

The personal stories of victims, some of which have escaped beyond the borders of Russia while others remain hidden in Chechnya, confirm:

- at least three deaths,
- the location of the illegal prison,
- and also confirm a consistent pattern of abuse faced by those detained.

Sources reported years of blackmail and beatings, but nothing compared to the concerted effort in hunting gay men that has taken place over the last month or so. During this period, (perceived) gay men were arrested and detained in illegal prisons, beaten, tortured and humiliated *en masse*, with male contacts from their phones suffering the same fate.

Response from federal authorities

After alarm over the concerted efforts in detention, torture and inhumane treatment of homosexual men in Chechnya was raised, the Russian LGBT Network filed reports with the Investigating Committee of Russia and the Federal Ombudsperson. To date, no investigation has been initiated.

Meanwhile, presidential Press Secretary, Dmitry Peskov stated that *“We do not have such information and it is not a prerogative of the Kremlin. If any actions have been taken by the law enforcement agencies, which, in the opinion of some citizens, were taken with some irregularities, these citizens can use their rights, file relevant complaints, and go to court.”*

Reaction from public authorities in Chechnya

Chechen officials continue to deny that gay people live in the region.

Follow-up actions

ILGA-Europe, the Russian LGBT Network and a number of other NGO partners have reached out to international institutions and national governments to advocate for the rights of Chechen gay men. An encouraging response has been received so far, with both public and private follow-up actions, from the EU, Council of Europe and others. Processes have also been commenced using the United Nations’ special procedures.

Call for action

Despite a strong response from the international community, **no investigations into the detention of (perceived) gay men in Chechnya have yet been started**, either at a local or federal level.

At least 100 men remain in detention and a growing number of survivors are making use of the hotline set up by the Russian LGBT Network seeking practical help in escaping the region. As such, further effort is needed to ensure the situation is halted, those detained are released, and a proper investigation is launched.

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

Annex 2.

End abuse and detention of gay men in Chechnya, UN human rights experts tell Russia

GENEVA (13 April 2017) – Men detained in the Russian Republic of Chechnya simply for being perceived to be gay must be immediately released and their abuse and persecution ended, United Nations human rights experts* say.

The experts are also calling on the Russian authorities to condemn firmly all homophobic statements, which constitute incitement to hatred and violence.

“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.

The appeal follows reports emerging from Chechnya since March of abductions of men perceived to be gay or bisexual, carried out by local militia and local security forces and followed by arbitrary detention, violence, torture and other ill-treatment.

There are even reported cases of killings based on the perceived sexual orientation. Some of them have also allegedly been carried out by family members themselves in so-called ‘honour killings’.

“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.

Much of the abuse is reported to have taken place at an unofficial detention centre close to the city of Argun.

The arrested men are subjected to physical and verbal abuse, torture including with electric shocks, beatings, insults and humiliations. 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 ‘honour killings’.

“We call on the authorities to proceed with the immediate release of everyone unlawfully detained in the Republic of Chechnya on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all suspected cases of abduction, unlawful detention, torture and unlawful killing, and to ensure that all those involved in such acts are held to account, and that victims are provided with effective remedy” the experts said.

The UN experts are also concerned about alleged homophobic statements made by local authorities, denying the existence in the Republic of persons with so-called ‘non-traditional’

sexual orientation and condoning the killing of gay men by family members and other citizens.

The experts condemned statements by Chechen officials suggesting that gay people should be hunted down and killed and warned that such comments constituted incitement to hatred and violence.

“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.

“We call on Russia to take urgent measures to protect the life, liberty and security of gay and bisexual people in Chechnya and to investigate, prosecute and punish acts of violence motivated by the victim’s sexual orientation,” the UN human rights experts concluded.

The experts are in contact with the Russian authorities and closely monitoring the situation.

(*) The UN experts: Mr. Vitit Muntarbhorn, Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on [sexual orientation](#) and gender identity; **Mr. Sètondji Roland Adjovi**, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working on [Arbitrary Detention](#); **Ms. Agnes Callamard**, Special Rapporteur on [extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); **Mr. Nils Melzer**, Special Rapporteur on [torture](#) and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment; and **Mr. David Kaye**, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection the right to [freedom of opinion and expression](#).

ENDS

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UN Human Rights, country page: [Russian Federation](#)

For more information and **media requests** please contact Mr. Damianos Serefidis ([+41 22 917 9681 / dserefidis@ohchr.org](#)), and Ms. Helle Iversen ([+41 22 917 94 21 / hiversen@ohchr.org](#))

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