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Crimes against Chechen gay men - Stories of survivors

The publication," in which we reported mass arrests and killings of residents of Chechnya on charges of suspected homosexual orientation, gained great traction. Officials of the Chechen republic denied the claims, and even the existence of gay people in the region, indicating that even if such people existed they would have been killed by their families.

In the meantime calls from victims and witnesses started coming in through the hotline set up by the Russian LGBT Network. Some have managed to escape to other cities in Russia, or beyond to Europe, others are hiding in Chechnya. We received 3 full accounts from people who are now safe abroad, and another 3 account about people who have passed away or are still hiding in Chechnya.

The stories have come in from a variety of people from different social circles, at different times, and from different parts of Chechnya, but they all show remarkable similarities pointing to mass repressions of homosexual men in Chechnya.

We have been able to piece together that the repressions started at the end of February when a man under heavy drug influence was detained and the contents of his phone showed content of a homosexual nature, and contained contacts of dozens of other homosexual men. This sparked the first wave of detentions and torture.

Those detained were taken to an illegal prison near Argun. Informants of the newspaper have also found evidence of official involvement in the detentions – a photo posted on instagram on March 7th shows the speaker of the parliament of Chechnya Magomed Daudov and Aub Kataev – Head of Ministry of Internal Affairs Department in Argun, with the description “These two have started terminating guys of non traditional sexuality in Argun.” Their participation was also confirmed by stories from survivors.

The stories who that among those detained were a large number of accidental victims. The phones of those detained were left on, and any men who called were immediately pulled into the spiders web of mass detentions for sexual purity of Chechnya. They too were illegally detained, beaten, interrogated and, in the best case scenario, released for massive bribes.

Novaya Gazeta is aware of 3 cases were the men detained died.

Mass repressions have been happening on a wide scale in Chechnya for the past 2 years. But this has not been directed at LGBT people until now. Perhaps this is an opportunity to break the silence of repressions, illegal detentions and torture in Chechnya, as we have received a large number of calls from people wanting to share their story, because for LGBT people, unlike others detained in Chechnya,

their very sexuality poses a death threat. Even if released, once their sexuality is known, society itself, including their families, may kill them to preserve honour.

Testimonies of survivors

1

For several years law enforcement officers blackmailed me for their silence. I had to pay large sums every month. Once in a while they would arrest me, beat and humiliate me. I ran away to Moscow, but they found me there too and beat me, and demanded money again. But that was nothing compared to what is happening to gay men at home now. It started at the end of February. The police took one guy, found content of a homosexual nature in his phone, as well as contact details of dozens of gay men, and that's how it started. Those detained were interrogated, forced to sit on bottles, beaten. Some were beaten to within an inch of death and then returned to their relatives like a sack of bones. I personally know of two deaths. If you were detained you could get out in one of three ways: pay a huge amount of money, give contact details of others, or be passed on to relatives with the expectation that the relatives would finish the job.

2

The place they took me to looks abandoned, but it is a secret prison about which there is no official information. In the room next to us were detainees suspected of fighting in Syria and their relatives, probably held there for years. Drug addicts are also held there. There were several dozen of us in one concrete room. And the number changed all the time. Three times a day we were let out to the bathroom. Also several times a day we were taken out to be beaten. They called it "questioning". The main aim was to get more contacts of gay men. For that reason they didn't turn off our phones after detention, they waited for someone to write or call us so they could be tricked into meeting and be detained too.

We were subjected to electric shock. It hurts. I held on as long as I could, until I lost consciousness and fell. When the current is generated and the body begins to shake, you stop thinking and start to scream. The cries of those being tortured were constant. We were also beaten with pipes. Always below the waist. They told us we were "dogs who don't deserve to live". They forced other detainees to humiliate us. They also beat us with sticks.

Some were beaten with extra force. There was one guy who was being tortured especially badly. He was there longer than us, he was completely broken. He was beaten so badly that there were open wounds on his body. They gave him to his relatives eventually, and after a while we found out that he died.

Reports on the hotline published with permission of the victims

1

A young man from Grozny, gay. A few months ago, he moved to N (a Russian city). He wanted to reside there, but did not manage to get a job, and was going to return to Chechnya in the middle of March. He tried to reach his friend back in Chechnya, but failed. In a week, his friend contacted him and told him, that he had been just released. He was detained by some security officials on suspicion of homosexuality.

In order to get the confession, they beat him with a hose and tortured him with electricity. He reported that about 30 people were locked in the same room together with him. According to him, the security officials themselves stated that the order came from the leaders of the Republic. The detained were forced to share the contacts of other gay men. The more the person informed, the longer he was detained.

2

Another person who contacted the Network reported that his acquaintance was also detained on suspicion of homosexuality. Messages in the social network "VKontakte" were the cause. People in "Terek" uniform (Special Rapid Response Team) put a young man in a car and took him to an unknown location. His family was not informed about the reasons for detention. The young man was detained and tortured for several days. The relatives managed to identify the place of detention. The father was told that that his son would be publicly shamed on TV and then released. The young man was indeed released, the conditions are unknown. His whereabouts are unknown. But there is information, that he never left Chechnya.

3

An anonymous source contacted the hotline and reported that he was detained and witnessed mass tortures of people suspected of homosexuality. It happened in an abandoned hut next to Argun city. He was detained on February 28. Fifteen people were locked in the same hut with him. The detained were beaten, tortured with electricity. The anonymous source provided photos with extensive hematomas. The detained were not fed properly. Sometimes people were beaten to death. On March 5, one young man was taken away by his father and brother. The relatives handcuffed him and drove him away. He never returned home. The rest of the detained were told: "If there are men in your families, they will kill you like they did him". The anonymous source was released on March 7. He managed to leave Chechnya together with his family. Now he is outside of Russia.