

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST IN DAGESTAN AT RISK

The safety of Magomed Hanmagomedov, an investigative journalist working for an independent newspaper in Dagestan, Russian Federation, may be at risk after he reported on the extrajudicial execution of four suspected armed fighters.

Magomed Hanmagomedov is a journalist working for the independent weekly newspaper *Chernovik* in Dagestan, a republic of the Russian Federation. On 9 July 2010, he published an article about an operation by Dagestani law enforcement officials which took place in the town of Derbent on 16 June 2010, in which four suspected armed fighters were killed. In his article, Magomed Hanmagomedov noted that two of the names of those killed were initially reported wrongly by the police. He questioned the official version of the event: that four men in a car refused to stop and opened fire at the police. He suggested instead that the driver and his three passengers may have been led into an ambush and gunned down. He also suggested that people other than the suspected fighters may have been present in the car.

Magomed Hanmagomedov has posted a video clip, apparently taken by one of the policemen who participated in this operation, on the newspaper's website alongside his article. The clip features the dead body of a young man lying on the ground and covered in blood, and two other bodies inside a car. A voice apparently pleading not to shoot can be heard at the beginning of the video clip followed by a number of shots fired, and the voice of a man condemning the "*borodachi*" ("bearded men" – a reference to Islamic groups, although none of the three corpses appear to have a beard).

Following the publication of his article, Magomed Hanmagomedov received phone calls from law enforcement officials expressing indignation at his article, and a number of mobile phone text messages from unknown numbers alleging that he was paid from abroad and working for militants. Magomed Hanmagomedov has been informed by a confidential source that the local prosecutor's office might be preparing a criminal case against him. The Russian human rights group Memorial has expressed concern about the safety of Magomed Hanmagomedov.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian or your own language:

- Urging the Russian authorities to ensure Magomed Hanmagomedov's safety;
- Calling on them to ensure that journalists are able to do their work, including journalist inquiries and publication of their findings, without intimidation, hindrance, harassment and interference;
- Urging them to conduct a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the alleged extrajudicial execution in Derbent on 16 June 2010.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 AUGUST 2010 TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs of Dagestan

Ali A. Magomedov
 Prospekt R. Gamzatova, 7
 367000 Makhachkala
 Republic of Dagestan
 Russian Federation
 Fax: +7 8722 994439

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation

Rashid Gumarovich Nurgaliev
 Ministry of Internal Affairs
 ul. Zhitnaia, 16
 119049 Moscow
 Russian Federation
 Fax: + 7 495 237 49 25

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Ombudsman of the Russian Federation
Vladimir Petrovich Lukin
ul. Miasnitskaia, 47
107084, Moscow
Russian Federation
 Fax: +7 495 607 74-70;
 +7 495 607 39 77

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The security situation in Dagestan has deteriorated significantly over recent years. Amidst a high level of violence and lawlessness, human rights defenders and journalists have been threatened or killed, and disappearances and torture continue to be reported. Amnesty International has also received reports of police brutality. In a letter to the Prosecutor General of Russia on 25 June 2010, the organization expressed concern about severe beating of a young female lawyer by police at the police station in Khasavyurt on 17 June 2010, where she had come to see her detained client.

There are regular reports of ambushes by militants against police and other officials, as well as of operations against alleged militants by members of law enforcement agencies, sometimes in violation of human rights safeguards. Questions have been raised repeatedly about the credibility of official reports, particularly those resulting in killings of suspected militants.

In 2008, a criminal case was opened against Magomed Hanmagomedov, alleging that his publication had expressed extremist views and incited inter-ethnic hatred. Although the investigation failed to prove this allegation and the case was dropped, Magomed Hanmagomedov's newspaper was forced to close. The newspaper *Chernovik* he currently works for has also been subjected to pressure and similar allegations have been made by the authorities against several members of its staff.

The report *Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North Caucasus Region*, prepared by Dick Marty, Special Rapporteur of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on the human rights situation in the North Caucasus and published in May 2010, notes that Dagestan has undergone "a fresh outbreak of terrorist acts which have unfortunately prompted responses of the security forces which are not always lawful and productive." The report specifically mentioned the town of Derbent as an example of "admirable age-old tradition of peaceable cohabitation of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities based on mutual tolerance" which, however, "is likely to be imperilled by the rise of extremism and the inappropriate official reactions."

UA: 162/10 Index: EUR 46/027/2010 Issue Date: 19 July 2010

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