

AI Index: PRE 01/627/2011
16 December 2011

Russia must act to protect journalists in Dagestan

The shocking murder of a journalist shot dead in Dagestan last night is a terrible sign of the risks journalists in Dagestan face, Amnesty International said today.

Khadzhimurad Kamalov, founder and editor of the newspaper Chernovik and an outspoken advocate of human rights, was shot outside his office in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan.

“The Russian federal and regional authorities must promptly and impartially investigate this sad and shocking murder of a courageous journalist who appears, like many others before him, to have been targeted for his work,” said John Dalhuisen, Deputy Director on Europe and Central Asia at Amnesty International.

Khadzhimurad Kamalov, 46, was a well-known journalist and activist who spoke out publicly against human rights violations in Dagestan and called on people to stand up for their rights.

The Dagestan investigation officials today said the murder might be linked to his professional work. Kamalov’s name appeared in 2009 on a distributed list of people to be killed. The anonymous author claimed that Kamalov associated with those responsible for the death of law enforcement officials in Dagestan.

Chernovik, which was founded by Kamalov in 2003, is known for its incisive, critical reporting on the political situation in Dagestan and a strong advocacy of dialogue between ethnic and religious communities in Dagestan.

The weekly newspaper is well-known for its forthright investigation and reporting on human rights violations by law enforcement bodies and armed groups. It also covers corruption, poverty and inequality in the volatile North Caucasus republic.

Journalists at Chernovik have faced systematic threats and harassment for their work.

Staff faced criminal proceedings for purportedly “inciting hatred and enmity” after publishing critical articles on the police and security forces in 2008. The case was closed in May 2011 with the acquittal of the journalists in court.

“This latest killing of a courageous and principled journalist sends a chilling message to other reporters and government critics,” said John Dalhuisen.

“The authorities must take effective measures to uphold the right to freedom of speech in Dagestan and especially to protect journalists, for whom the situation has become dire.”

Dagestan is one of the most dangerous places in the region to be a journalist.

Another journalist from Chernovik, Magomed Hanmagomedov, was threatened by law enforcement officials after he published articles in 2010 about alleged police killings of unarmed suspected fighters, and also beaten by unknown assailants in May 2011.

Ali Kamalov, a relative of Khadzhimurad and the Chairman of the Union of Journalists in Dagestan, told Amnesty International that violence and threats have become commonplace for journalists in Dagestan. At least six of his colleagues have been killed in the past two years.