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Russian Federation: Stop the hunt on human rights activists

The latest murder of a human rights activist in Chechnya demonstrates the complete disregard of the rule of law that prevails in Chechnya today, Amnesty International said.

The organization strongly condemns the killing of Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband, Alik (Umar) Dzhabraïlov, whose bodies were found in the boot of a car early this morning in the Chechen capital Grozny. They had both been shot. Zarema Sadulayeva was the head of the Russian charity, Let's Save the Children, which helps children affected by the violence in Chechnya and works closely with the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF.

"Coming only four weeks after the murder of leading Chechen human rights activist Natalia Estemirova, the latest killings are a strong reminder of the climate of impunity in Chechnya," said Amnesty International.

"The international community must wake up to the fact that the systematic and continuing failure of the authorities in the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic to investigate effectively the murders of human rights activists or indeed any other human rights violations that have taken place over the past years is a strong indication that those authorities are at least acquiescent to these crimes."

"The pledges of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov that they will find those responsible for the murders are worth little, considering the complete failure of the authorities over the last years to bring to justice those responsible for the killings and abductions of human rights activists, lawyers and journalists working in the North Caucasus."

"The light of public scrutiny is gradually being turned off in Chechnya. First, international organizations and journalists were banned from the region, and now, local civil society is being eliminated. This can only lead to the further unleashing of lawlessness which has already been destabilizing the North Caucasus for many years."

Zarema Sadulayeva was a courageous human rights activist who had been harassed by the authorities for her work. Four years ago she told Amnesty International delegates visiting the North Caucasus how the office of her organization had been searched and her computer taken by the authorities. What Zarema Sadulayeva told Amnesty International's delegates then is still very valid today:

"Human rights violations continue in Chechnya unabated – all the time people are being abducted, forcefully disappeared, beaten or murdered. The complaints of relatives are being disregarded by the authorities. All this is happening under complete informational blockade. Journalists and independent monitors are not allowed in the republic."

The murder of Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband should alert the international community to the precarious circumstances in which human rights activists work in the Russian Federation. It follows the killings earlier this year of Natalia Estemirova and of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov, both close friends of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who herself was murdered in 2006, as well as of journalist Anastasia Baburova.

“It is critically important in these circumstances that the authorities fully investigate these crimes and do not stop short from investigating the possible involvement of government officials in the murder of their critics,” Amnesty International said.

“The international community must take concrete and unified action to put pressure on the Russian authorities to end the impunity.”

Background

In April this year the Russian authorities announced the end of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Chechnya. However, in the North Caucasus in recent months there have been a number of high-profile killings amid signs that tensions in the region are on the rise.

In a report published earlier this month, [*Rule without law: Human rights violations in the North Caucasus*](#), Amnesty International called for full accountability for the human rights violations that have taken place as the only way to bring about real stability and a return to civil peace in Chechnya and the North Caucasus.