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RUSSIAN FEDERATION: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS FOR THE SAFETY OF MISSING JOURNALISTS IN CHECHNYA

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of a number of journalists who have gone missing following abduction in the Chechen Republic during the past several months and earlier during the conflict in Chechnya.

"Journalists might have been deliberately targeted solely on the grounds of their professional activities," Amnesty International said.

In the latest case, three Russian journalists and a technician were reportedly kidnapped in Chechnya on the evening of 4 March by a group of unidentified armed people. The journalists' car was ambushed as they were heading home to the outskirts of Grozny, the Chechen capital.

News reports citing the Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs, identified two of the abducted journalists as Yury Arkhipov and Nikolay Mamolashvili, of Radio Russia, and the third as Nikolay Zagnoiko, of the official news agency, ITAR-TASS.

These recent cases are far from isolated. In January 1997, two reporters with the Russian ORT television station, Roman Perevezentsev and Vyacheslav Tibelius, were kidnapped and released after a month. On 23 February, Italian journalist Mauro Galligani, of the Italian magazine "*Panorama*", was also allegedly kidnapped in Grozny while on a reporting assignment.

Eight other journalists -- from Russia, the Ukraine and the United States -- have apparently gone missing in Chechnya since December 1994. Responsibility for all these cases is, as yet, unknown.

"The Government of the Chechen Republic and the Government of the Russian Federation should condemn these incidents and ensure that an immediate, impartial and effective investigation into all cases of abduction of journalists in the Chechen Republic is undertaken. They should also ensure that all results are made public and bring to justice -- in accordance with the law -- anyone found responsible for human rights violations in relation to these abductions," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International also urges the Chechen and Russian authorities to undertake immediate steps to ensure the safety of all journalists working in the Chechen Republic at present and in the future.

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