

**PUBLIC**

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**Fear for safety**

**06 February 2004**

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION / CHECHEN REPUBLIC  
defender**

**Imran EZHIEV (m), aged 53, human rights**

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Imran Ezhiev, a prominent Chechen human rights defender, was recently detained overnight and reportedly ill-treated by police in Ingushetia. He was released when the head of the Presidential Human Rights Commission intervened. He has been persecuted by the authorities for some time, and Amnesty International is concerned that he will now face further retaliation.

Imran Ezhiev is the head of the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship's Information Center in the Northern Caucasus, regional coordinator of the Moscow Helsinki Group and a member of a working group on human rights in Chechnya organized by the Presidential Human Rights Commission.

On 29 January, he was accompanying the head of the Russian Presidential Human Rights Commission, Ella Pamfilova, on a visit to the camps for internally-displaced (IDP) Chechens in Ingushetia. According to Imran Ezhiev, shortly after Ella Pamfilova left the "Sotsita" camp, several police officers approached him and asked to see his documents. They accused him of "trying to organize an unsanctioned demonstration" in the camp. When he explained that he was accompanying Ella Pamfilova, they let him go.

Some 40 minutes later, a group of armed men in military uniforms stopped Imran Ezhiev's car, as he was travelling to rejoin Ella Pamfilova, and took him and his two companions forcibly to Sunzhenskoe Regional Department of Internal Affairs (ROVD) - a police station - in the village of Sleptsovskaja. There, several officers allegedly repeatedly hit Imran Ezhiev on the back and beat his head against the wall, while threatening to hand the men over to the Russian federal forces, where they would "disappear" without a trace. Imran Ezhiev claimed that the police officers read the medical documents he carried with him and were aware that he had a spinal injury when they hit his back. One of the police officers allegedly offered to release the three if they confessed to several unsolved thefts.

The next morning, Ella Pamfilova learnt that the men had been detained, and reportedly went to the ROVD and insisted that they be released. The police let the three men go later that day.

On 5 February Imran Ezhiev visited the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Ingushetia to file a complaint about his arbitrary detention. The Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Zaiyaludin Kutuyev, allegedly told him that the police had acted within the law and that nobody who is not a government official, including human rights monitors and journalists, has the right to visit the IDP camps.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has reported on human rights defenders being targeted by Russian armed forces in Chechnya on a number of occasions. Imran Ezhiev himself has been detained 17 times, most recently in March 2003, when he was taken from his car by armed, masked men and held for approximately three days, during which he was reportedly tortured. His cousin Akhmed Ezhiev was shot and killed at his home near Shali on 18 December 2002.

On 29 November 2002 Malika Umazheva, the former head of the local administration of the village of Alkhan-Kala in Chechnya, was killed reportedly by masked men in uniforms who entered her house around midnight claiming to be looking for "Islamic extremists". It is alleged that Russian forces killed her in retaliation for her outspoken criticism of the numerous raids on her village. She had worked closely with the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship.

On 16 January 2004, the mutilated body of human rights activist Aslan Davletukaev was found near the town of Gudermes in Chechnya. He had been working with the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship, and had reportedly been kidnapped by Russian federal forces on 10 January. Several other members of the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship have been killed, allegedly by Russian forces, in what appears to be a deliberate campaign to target human rights activists in this organization. On 13 December 2001, Luiza Betergirieva, a volunteer working with the Society, was shot and killed at a roadblock near the city of Argun. On 4 August 2003, Arthur Akhmatukaev, a member of the Society who had recently married Imran Ezhiev's niece, "disappeared" after he was taken away by Russian soldiers in an armoured vehicle. Criminal investigations into these incidents have been inconclusive and no one has been held responsible.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Russian or your own language:**

- calling on the authorities to put an end to the persecution, harassment and intimidation of Imran Ezhiev and other human rights defenders, who are members of the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship;
- expressing concern that Imran Ezhiev has been harassed and arbitrarily detained solely for his legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression as a human rights defender;
- expressing concern at the allegations that he was ill-treated by the policemen who detained him;
- asking for an immediate investigation into these allegations;
- expressing concern for Imran Ezhiev's safety, especially in view of the reported extrajudicial execution of a member of Ezhiev's organization, Aslan Davletukaev, in January, as well as the continuing persecution of members of the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Russian Federation

Vladimir Vladimirovich PUTIN

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Russian Federation

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**Salutation: Dear President**

Procurator General of the Russian Federation

Vladimir USTINOV

General Procuracy of the Russian Federation

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**Salutation: Dear Procurator General**

Procurator of the Republic of Ingushetia

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**Salutation: Dear Procurator**

**COPIES TO:**

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and to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 March 2004.