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A staff member of Ingushetian human rights NGO Mashr briefly ‘disappeared’; others facing growing pressure

Amnesty International is concerned about fresh reports of intimidation and growing pressure from the authorities against staff members of human rights NGO Mashr in the Republic of Ingushetia in the North Caucasus.

In the evening of 29 February 2012, the organization’s accountant Murad Yandiev went missing on his way from home to the office in the town of Karabulak. The family raised concerns after 18:40 when he stopped answering his phone and failed to arrive at Mashr’s office. The family contacted all hospitals in the vicinity as well as the nearest mortuary in Nazran, but heard no further news about Murad. Fearing that he might have been forcibly disappeared by members of security forces, the family contacted local human rights defenders for help. They also filed petitions asking that Murad’s whereabouts be established with the Prosecutor’s Office and the Karabulak police, who failed to inform them that he was in police custody.

At around 10 the next morning, the Head of Mashr Magomed Mutsolgov learnt from a member of the Presidential Administration that Murad Yandiev was being held by police and went to Karabulak police station only to find out that Murad was not there. After another call to the Presidential Administration he learnt that Murad Yandiev was in police custody in Nazran. Being a member of the Public Monitoring Commission for Places of Custody, Magomed Mutsolgov and a colleague from another NGO, accompanied by Murad Yandiev’s lawyer, visited Nazran District Police Station and Nazran city police station, where they found Murad Yandiev. They established that he had been detained together with three other men during a security operation the previous evening.

However, they were only provided with this information and allowed to see the detainees after they themselves had been questioned regarding the purpose of their visit not only by the Head of the police station, but also by the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Centre for Combating Extremism officials. According to Magomed Mutsolgov, when the detainees were finally brought in, he noticed scratches on Murad Yandiev’s face and asked whether he had been subjected to any ill-treatment. Murad Yandiev reportedly nodded. At this point, the Head of the police station reportedly intervened and cut the meeting short. He also reportedly threatened Magomed Mutsolgov that if he dared to take the matter further his home in Karabulak would be raided by police and he would “get the same treatment as Magomed Khazbiev before him and more”.¹ Magomed Mutsolgov, his colleague, and the lawyer were forced to leave the building without a chance to talk to the detainees.

¹ On the beating and ill-treatment of Magomed Khazbiev by police, see [Russian Federation: Civil Society activists beaten and detained following a protest against enforced disappearances in Ingushetia](#), 24 March 2011, AI Index: EUR 46/014/2011.

Reportedly, Murad Yandiev's and the other three men's detention had not been officially registered upon arrival at the police station, as required by the law. The lawyers were first able to talk with them later that afternoon, following which all four were sentenced to six days of administrative arrest for resisting lawful authority. None have been charged with a criminal offence.

Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concern about the reported practice of individuals being detained by unidentified law enforcement officials without duly notifying their families, allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in custody, and cases of enforced disappearance in Ingushetia and other North Caucasus republics. All such reports must be effectively, promptly and impartially investigated, and any officials found in breach of international human rights norms and national law be brought to account.

The organization has also repeatedly raised concern about harassment and pressure by the authorities targeted at human rights organizations such as Mashr in Ingushetia or the Interregional Committee against Torture in Chechnya.² Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to recognize the critically important role human rights defenders play in promoting human rights and monitoring and reporting on their violations, and to ensure that all human rights activists and members of human rights NGOs in the North Caucasus and throughout the Russian Federation, are able to do their work free from harassment and reprisals. Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to investigate effectively, promptly and impartially all incidents involving threats and attacks against human rights defenders.

Background information

Human rights NGO Mashr was founded in 2005 by relatives of several forcibly disappeared persons, and has since been active in documenting cases of enforced disappearances and other human rights violations in Ingushetia. Over the years, its members have received threats and been subjected to different forms of intimidation and harassment by the authorities. For example, in July 2008, Mashr staff member Zurab Tsechoev was taken from his home by unidentified law enforcement officials, severely beaten and then dumped by the side of a road. This incident has never been effectively investigated and no-one has ever been held accountable for his abduction and beating. In March 2011, his house was raided by police officers.

Over the years, the head of Mashr Magomed Mutsolgov has repeatedly faced threats and intimidation in connection with his human rights activism. Not long before Murad Yandiev's brief enforced disappearance, Amnesty International learned that staff members of Mashr had been subjected to increased intimidation and pressure by the authorities. In particular, members of law enforcement agencies have made frequent visits to Mashr's office in recent weeks; Magomed Mutsolgov and his colleagues have reportedly been followed by cars with tinted glass windows and no number plates, and there have been increased checks of Mashr's activities by a numbers of state organs.

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² Amnesty International, [Human rights defenders working in Chechnya subjected to further threats and harassment](#), 3 August 2011, EUR 46/034/2011. See also Amnesty International, [Russian Federation: Beaten up for speaking out: Attacks on human rights defenders in the Russian Federation](#), 5 October 2011, EUR 46/038/2011