

PUBLIC

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"Disappearance"/abduction/torture and -ill-treatment

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Elina Ersenoeva (f), journalist, aged 26

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Elina Ersenoeva, a freelance journalist and a staff member of an organization raising awareness of HIV/AIDS, has not been seen since being abducted on 17 August in Grozny in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. She may have "disappeared" and is at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

According to Elina Ersenoeva's mother, Rita Ersenoeva, Elina and her aunt, Rovzan Astemirova, were stopped on the street at around 9am on 17 August in the centre of Grozny by men in camouflage uniforms. The men asked the two women to get into two waiting cars. Elina Ersenoeva initially refused, but the men then forced her to get in. As soon as the women got into the car, plastic bags were put over their heads and they were driven to a building where they were held for about two hours in adjacent rooms. Rovzan Astemirova was taken back to a car and driven for a short while, with her head still covered, before being released. Shortly afterwards, she received a call from Elina Ersenoeva's mobile phone. Elina Ersenoeva told her she should "keep things quiet for the moment" and that there was no need to panic. Elina Ersenoeva reportedly called two more times that day and said that she was not being ill-treated, she had been given food, and would be released in a few hours. During each call, a man took the phone from Elina, and said not to worry and not to report the incident to anyone. After her third call at about 7pm on 17 August, her phone was switched off and she has not been seen or heard of since.

Two days before her detention, Elina Ersenoeva had asked for support from representatives of the International Helsinki Federation (IHF) and Centre "Demos", a Russian human rights organization, as she and her family were being harassed and threatened over several months by men, possibly members of law enforcement agencies. While Rita Ersenoeva told Amnesty International she was not even sure that the men, who detained her several times and demanded a ransom, belonged to the same group, she and colleagues of Elina assume that it may be linked to rumours that her daughter was married to Shamil Basaev, a leading Chechen separatist fighter. In November 2005 Elina Ersenoeva had been abducted by men allegedly affiliated to Shamil Basaev. Elina Ersenoeva was reportedly taken to see Shamil Basaev and threatened with reprisals to her family if she reported this meeting to the police. After four or five days she was released and returned to her family. In February 2006 she reportedly met Shamil Basaev again. According to her mother, that was the last time Elina Ersenoeva saw Shamil Basaev. While it has been reported in the media that Elina Ersenoeva was married to Shamil Basaev, her mother told Amnesty International that her daughter had been his hostage and did not speak about what had happened to her in order to save the life of her two brothers and her mother.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the ongoing armed conflict in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns that relatives of those suspected of being armed opposition members have allegedly been taken hostage by pro-government forces. Amnesty International has also raised concerns about human rights abuses by armed opposition groups, including hostage-taking and indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

Amnesty International has insufficient information about the circumstances of Elina Ersenoeva's marriage to Shamil Basaev. However, the organization is aware that bride-kidnapping does occur in Chechnya and other republics of the North Caucasus of the Russian Federation. While a woman normally would have the right to refuse to get married to her captor, in the current situation of an ongoing armed conflict and the absence of the rule of law this may not always be possible.

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

- expressing concern for the fate and well-being of Elina Ersenoeva;
- urging the authorities to investigate the whereabouts and well-being of Elina Ersenoeva;
- if she is being detained by security forces in the Chechen Republic, calling on the Russian authorities to release her immediately or charge her with a recognizable criminal offence in accordance with Russian and international law;
- urging the authorities to make any findings of the investigation into her whereabouts immediately known to her family and to bring to justice those found responsible for her abduction;
- calling on the Russian authorities to protect the rights of those under its jurisdiction, no matter what their affiliations are, and to abstain from harassment and persecution of relatives of those suspected to have committed acts of terrorism.

**APPEALS TO:**

Valerii Alekseevich Kuznetsov  
Procurator of the Chechen Republic  
Office of the Public Procurator of the Chechen Republic  
Ul. Garazhnaia 9b, Grozny, 364000, Chechen Republic, Russian Federation  
**Fax: +7 8712 22 31 43 / 22 31 48 (if someone answers say "fax please")**  
**Salutation: Dear Procurator**

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika  
Procurator General  
General Procuracy of the Russian Federation  
Bolshaia Dmitrovka 15d., Moscow, 125993, Russian Federation  
**Fax: + 7 495 692 1725 (if someone answers say "fax please")**  
**Salutation: Dear Procurator General**

**COPIES TO:**

Ella Aleksandrovna Pamfilova  
Chairperson  
The Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights Council under the President of the Russian Federation  
Staraya pl. 4, Moscow, 103132, Russian Federation  
**Email: sovetpamfilova@yandex.ru**

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

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 October 2006.