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RUSSIA: MAN ‘DISAPPEARED,’ APPARENTLY FOR HIS SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Chechen Authorities Should Immediately Free Idris Arsamikov

Russian authorities have arbitrarily arrested and forcibly disappeared a man who had been previously detained and tortured in Chechnya for his presumed sexual orientation, ten international and Russian human rights organizations said today.

Idris Arsamikov’s whereabouts remain unknown, and the groups stressed that his safety and life are at risk. Russian authorities should immediately release him, and in the event of any further delay in his release, disclose his whereabouts, protect his right to security of person, ensure that he is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, and grant him access to a lawyer.

On 15 February 2023, Russian authorities arrested Arsamikov, 28, on fabricated fraud charges, in Moscow’s Domodedovo airport and transferred him to Chechnya. On 17 February, the police at the Shelkovsky District Police Department, in Chechnya, refused to disclose Arsamikov’s whereabouts to his lawyers or to give them access to their client. On the same day, two videos were published on Arsamikov’s page in VKontakte social media showing him at his home, with his mother and uncle stating that he is fine and denouncing human rights defenders’ efforts to help him and making other statements that appear to have been forcibly extracted.

There have been several prominent cases in which Chechen law enforcement staged videos of victims of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.

In 2018, Arsamikov fled Russia following his detention and torture by the Chechen police for his presumed homosexuality. He received refugee status in the Netherlands and permission to remain there for five years.

In March 2022, Arsamikov returned to Russia to attend his father’s funeral. Arsamikov had lost his Russian passport and obtained a temporary travel document from the Russian Embassy in the Netherlands.

Arsamikov told human rights defenders from Crisis Group North Caucasus SOS that upon returning to Chechnya, when he went to the police station in the village of Shelkovskaya to get a new Russian passport, the police issued him a Russian internal passport but confiscated his other documents. Because the authorities refused to issue Arsamikov a travel passport, he had to stay in Chechnya.

Arsamikov told human rights defenders whom he had asked for help that he had been arbitrarily detained and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in the Shelkovsky District Police Department at least three times since March 2022.

In February 2023, Arsamikov managed to fly from the Chechen capital, Grozny, to Domodedovo airport in Moscow, where police arrested him. The police cited a criminal investigation into fraud initiated in 2021, when he was still living in the Netherlands. According to the lawyer hired by human rights defenders to represent Arsamikov, the arrest sheet, signed by the head of criminal investigation at the Shelkovsky District Police Department, had been issued just hours before he was detained.

The circumstances of his arrest and detention, the Chechen authorities’ record of torturing and ill-treating Arsamikov, and other men for their presumed sexual orientation, and the fact that the fraud allegations surfaced only after he managed to leave Chechnya, raise strong concerns that he is being persecuted for his perceived sexual orientation, the groups said.

Arsamikov’s persecution fits a pattern by which Chechen authorities arrest and detain LGBTI people and human rights defenders on politically motivated, fabricated charges. In one case, in January 2022, the Chechen police arbitrarily arrested Zarema Musaeva, mother of the human rights activists Abubakar and Ibragim Yangulbaevs, and took her from Nizhnii Novgorod where she lived with her family, to Chechnya as a “witness” in a fraud case. There she was arbitrarily charged with using violence against a police officer and fraud and kept in custody. Her trial is ongoing. In 2017, Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta revealed a brutal crackdown on LGBTI people in Chechnya, when dozens of men

were abducted, tortured and killed for their real or perceived sexual orientation. No one has yet been held accountable for these crimes.

Enforced disappearances under international law are the deprivation of a person's liberty by state officials or their agents followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty, or to reveal the person's whereabouts or fate. Families must live with the uncertainty of not knowing whether their loved ones are safe, and they worry over their conditions in captivity.

Amnesty International

Centre for Protection of Human Rights Memorial

Civic Assistance Committee

COC Netherlands

Crew Against Torture

Crisis Group North Caucasus SOS

Human Rights Watch

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)