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Joint statement: Russian Federation: Ensure safety of two Chechen men arbitrarily detained and forcibly transferred to Chechnya

We, the undersigned, express our grave concern over reports that two Chechen men were arbitrarily detained by the police in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod and forcibly transferred to Chechnya. The Russian authorities should immediately establish their whereabouts, ensure their safety and secure their release unless they are charged with internationally recognisable criminal offence. The men are at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment and there is a risk to their lives.

On 4 February, the Russian LGBT Network reported that Nizhny Novgorod special purpose police unit (OMON) had detained Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev at their residence. The police informed a lawyer working with the LGBT Network, who was seeking to establish the two men's whereabouts, that the men had been taken by car to the police station of Gudermes district, Republic of Chechnya.

On 6 February, police questioned the men at Gudermes district police station, without informing them about the grounds of their detention and not allowing the lawyer to talk to them. [The lawyer said that Magamadov and Isaev looked exhausted and intimidated]. The men were nominally released after the questioning but immediately re-arrested and taken to a police station in Sernovodsk district. The men were "pushed" to refuse legal aid, prompting the LGBT Network to send a new lawyer to Chechnya. At time of writing, the police have refused to disclose the grounds for Magamadov's and Isaev's detention or any other circumstances of the case. They have also refused to accept a petition challenging their abduction. On 7 February the aid of the head of the Chechen Republic and the minister of information and press announced that Magamadov and Isaev confessed to being complicit with a member of an illegal armed group. The current whereabouts of the men are unknown. We have grave concerns that Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev signed or agreed to false statements under torture and face criminal prosecution on a fabricated case.

In April 2020, Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev were arbitrary detained by the Chechen police and held at the premises of the patrol police regiment named after Akhmad Kadyrov. There, according to their account, they were tortured and otherwise ill-treated for moderating independent youth Telegram channel "Osai Nakh 95" that contained many posts critical of the Chechen authorities. They were released after a humiliating video with their "apologies" had been published on the Internet. In July 2020, the LGBT

Network helped Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev leave Chechnya and move to Nizhny Novgorod due to ongoing concerns over their safety.

The Chechen Republic is an enclave in Russia, where crimes under international law and serious human rights violations, including mass arbitrary detentions, torture and other ill-treatment, and extrajudicial killings are being committed on a regular basis. The Russian authorities are ultimately responsible for the violence and intimidation against critics and opponents of Chechnya's leadership, including physical attacks, torture, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. Prominent cases last year include attacks on human rights lawyer Marina Dubrovina and investigative journalist Elena Milashina in Grozny in February, killings of exiled bloggers Imran Aliev in France and Mamikhan Umarov in Austria, an attempted murder on blogger Tumsu Abdurakhmanov in Sweden and the torture and enforced disappearance of moderator of Telegram channel 1Adat Salman Tepsurkaev.

We call upon the Russian authorities to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev, in particular to confirm their whereabouts and secure their immediate release. If there is credible evidence to charge them with an internationally recognised criminal offence, they should be in the custody of Russian not Chechen authorities and must be provided with full legal due process protection according to international law on the rights and protection of detainees and fair trial standards.

Amnesty International

Centre for Conflict Analysis and Prevention

Civic Assistance

Civil Rights Defenders

Committee Against Torture

Human Rights Centre "Memorial"

Human Rights Watch

Norwegian Helsinki Committee