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Chechnya: Andrey Babitsky tells Amnesty International of torture in “filtration camp”

Amnesty International welcomes the release of Radio Liberty journalist Andrey Babitsky but calls on the Russian government to reveal the truth behind the saga of his arrest, detention and handover. In a telephone conversation with Amnesty International earlier today, Andrey Babitsky said that he had been exchanged by the Russian authorities against his will and was held in a house in southern Chechnya by unidentified Chechens.

“I was not beaten by the Chechens who held me but they treated me really badly. It was psychological ill-treatment. Every day I was expecting the worst to happen to me. I don’t exactly know who held me but I have my interpretation and my suspicions,” said Babitsky.

Andrey Babitsky told Amnesty International the Chechens forced him to record the videotaped message shown on Russian television on 8 February which stated that he was ‘ok’ but that he wanted to return home.

On his detention in Chernokozovo “filtration camp”, Andrey Babitsky said:

“I was beaten up with truncheons by Russian guards in Chernokozovo on the second day of my detention. This is a routine procedure in the camp. They beat any newcoming detainee by a few dozen blows of a truncheon on the body. I was kept in a cell with 15 other detainees. One of them was really badly beaten while I was there. I heard the screams of victims all the time. I heard monstrous torture being carried out there...”

Andrey Babitsky also revealed that he heard a woman detainee screaming all night long while being tortured and possibly raped by the guards.

Babitsky resurfaced late on 25 February in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, after weeks of speculation on his handover, his whereabouts and whether he was even alive.

He said on Russian television today, channel NTV, that his Chechen captors forced him to agree to flee to Azerbaijan. He said they had taken his passport and identification papers and forged an Azeri passport, but failed to remember they needed a border stamp.

Babitsky was driven to Dagestan and was forced by the two Chechens accompanying him to check in to a hotel with the false passport. He was arrested during what the Dagestani authorities claimed to have been a routine check of identity documents of everybody in the hotel and released after the intervention of Acting President Vladimir Putin.

President Putin reportedly said he doubted Babitsky was dangerous enough to warrant being held in custody. However, he was released pending further investigation and is not allowed to leave the city limits of Moscow.

Amnesty International is calling on the Russian government to reveal the facts surrounding the arrest of Andrey Babitsky-- his incommunicado detention, ill-treatment and forcible transfer to Chechens apparently working in close cooperation with the Russian forces, and to hold those responsible for human rights violations to account.

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