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Russian Federation: Civil Society activists beaten and detained following a protest against enforced disappearances in Ingushetia

Amnesty International is concerned at reports of the beating and unlawful detention of civil society activist Magomed Khazbiev and his two brothers, Murad and Berd, shortly after the dispersal of a spontaneous protest against enforced disappearances at around midday on 23 March in Nazran, Ingushetia.

Amnesty International urges the Russian authorities to release Magomed, Murad and Berd Khazbiev without delay or charge them with a recognizable offence. Amnesty International welcomes latest reports from the family suggesting that an investigation into the allegations of the Khazbievs' ill-treatment and unlawful detention could be initiated and calls on the Russian authorities to conduct it promptly, impartially and effectively.

According to reports, the protest was organized by the relatives of Ilez Gorchkhanov, a young man who had been abducted on 21 March by unidentified armed men believed to be law enforcement officers. Around 80 protesters blocked one of the main roads in the centre of Nazran demanding that the authorities inform them of Ilez Gorchkhanov's whereabouts and put an end to enforced disappearances in Ingushetia. Shortly after the protest began, armed police arrived.

A number of senior Ministry of the Interior officials and the acting Head of the Security Council also arrived and started to negotiate with the protesters promising to take steps to establish the whereabouts of Ilez Gorchkhanov and asking them to go home. However, the participants of the rally were not satisfied with these promises and demanded that the necessary steps be taken immediately. After the participants refused to leave, the police tried to remove them forcibly and reportedly fired warning shots and used rubber batons and gun butts to disperse the demonstrators. Reportedly, some protestors threw stones at the police. Several protestors are believed to have been injured, including women, and several protestors were detained. Amnesty International has not been able to establish whether any police officers were injured.

As the protest was being dispersed, Magomed Khazbiev, his brother Berd, who were present at the scene, and another brother Ali, who stayed in their car, were also reportedly beaten by the police. Their car was reportedly shot at as they were leaving the site of the demonstration. According to reports received from the Khazbiev family, Ali Khazbiev received a serious head injury and was taken to hospital a couple of hours later after his family called an ambulance.

According to Magomed Khazbiev's family, shortly after he and his brothers returned home from the protest, their house was raided by masked armed law enforcement officers who arrived in two military UAZ vehicles and a black Lada Priora car. Without producing any identification papers or explaining the reason for their visit, they reportedly took Magomed, Murad, Berd and their father, Khamzat, outside, made them lie face down on the ground and beat them with batons (Ali was not at home at the time). As a result of the beatings, Khamzat Khazbiev lost consciousness. The beating took place in front of the women and children of the family. The security officers then drove the three Khazbiev brothers away.

Later, an official statement was posted on the Ingushetia Ministry of the Interior website acknowledging detention of Magomed Khazbiev for 'trying to organize public disorder.' The statement also alleged that Magomed Khazbiev 'showed resistance to the police using a traumatic gun' (a weapon firing rubber pellets).

The statement did not officially confirm Magomed Khazbiev's place of detention, nor did it acknowledge the detention of Murad or Berd Khazbiev.

Neither a lawyer nor family members were allowed contact with the detained Khazbiev brothers immediately after their arrest. However, Khamzat Khazbiev was allowed to see his sons late at night. According to the family, he had seen clear signs of beating and injuries on his sons. A lawyer was allowed to visit the Khazbiev brothers today. Amnesty International spoke with Magomed Khazbiev and his lawyer today. Magomed Khazbiev confirmed that he is being held at Nazran City Police Station. He also repeated allegations of ill-treatment at the hands of the law enforcement officers who detained him and his brothers.

Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to abide by its international human rights obligations and respect national legislation guaranteeing the Khazbiev brothers access to a lawyer, necessary medical treatment and communication with family members for the duration of their detention.

The allegations of ill-treatment and unlawful detention of Magomed Khazbiev and his brothers must be promptly, fully and impartially investigated and anyone identified as responsible brought to justice.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to investigate whether the force used to disperse the protest in Nazran was proportionate and in full compliance with international human rights standards and national law.

The organization is also calling on the Russian authorities to investigate the alleged enforced disappearance of Ilez Gorchkhanov, establish his fate and whereabouts and inform his family of these. If established that Ilez Gorchkhanov is being detained by a law enforcement agency, he must be released or formally charged and granted access to a lawyer and allowed to communicate with his relatives.

Background

Magomed Khazbiev is a prominent politician and civil society activist in Ingushetia, and a member of the Expert Council under the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Russian Federation. He is known for his publications and interviews criticizing human rights violations by members of law enforcement agencies in Ingushetia, as well as policies of the Ingush leadership and corruption among senior officials in the region. Magomed Khazbiev is also the main editor of the popular opposition news website Ingushetiyaru.com. The site's two previous owners and editors, Magomed Yevloev and Maksharip Aushev, died in suspicious circumstances in 2008 and 2009 respectively. On 12 February 2011, Magomed Khazbiev was briefly hospitalized in Moscow with internal haemorrhage. He believes that he may have been poisoned by secret services to prevent him from holding a press conference on 16 February on human rights violations in Ingushetia.

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