

Young woman at risk of torture and abuse after abduction and return to Chechnya

On 10 June 2021, police officers in Dagestan accompanied by Chechen law enforcement officials raided a women's shelter in Makhachkala in search of Khalimat Taramova, a 22-year-old woman who had fled Chechnya after suffering domestic abuse because of her sexual orientation. It was confirmed on 13 June that she had been subsequently forcibly returned to her family in Grozny, Chechnya.

We, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), are seriously concerned for Taramova's safety and well-being and believe she is at imminent risk of violence and abuse by her family members as well as by the Chechen authorities.

We therefore call on the authorities of the Russian Federation to open a prompt and transparent investigation into her abduction, make the conclusions public and bring those responsible to justice.

We also call on them to ensure Taramova's physical safety as a victim of domestic violence, make public her current state of health and ensure her access to the lawyer of her choice.

The international community should continue to put pressure on Russia to end domestic violence and abuse against LGBT+ persons.

Overview of the case

Khalimat Taramova is the daughter of Ayub Taramov, a former Chechen official close to the current head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov. A member of the LGBT+ community, Taramova has in the past suffered serious persecution and abuse, including beatings at the hands of her relatives and has been subjected to conversion therapy. Before fleeing to Dagestan, she was locked in her house for six months and not allowed to contact the outside world.

In Dagestan, Taramova took refuge in a shelter run by local women's group Marem. While staying at the shelter, and responding to the request of Dagestani law enforcement officers, she recorded a video message addressed to Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs stating that she had voluntarily left her home and asking them not to come looking for her. However, on 10 June, police officers and unidentified men dressed in civilian clothing and black uniform, who appeared to be members of the Chechen security forces, raided the Makhachkala shelter. The police dragged five women down the stairs out of the shelter leaving three of them with multiple bruises and abrasions, before detaining them and taking them to the local police department where they were charged with 'disobeying police orders'. The women's attempts to complain about the physical assault they experienced during the raid were

dismissed by police officers. The five women were kept in custody overnight, but acquitted and released the next day due to lack of evidence. Svetlana Anokhina, Maysarat Kilyaskhanova and Iraidia Smirnova filed a complaint with the police for abuse of power connected to the beatings received and the illegal entry into the shelter.

Meanwhile, Taramova was lured into a car by a man who said he was her neighbour and promising to protect her. This man was in fact working with the police and he drove Taramova, with her partner Anna Manylova, to the Lenninskii Police Station. She was told to write a statement saying she had been forced to leave home. When she refused and wrote her own version of events, she was told by the police officials that her 'lifestyle' does not conform to Russia's traditions.

The police escorted the two women through the backdoor of the building to a car with Chechen number plates. Taramova was dragged into the car by men in plain clothing, and driven back to the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, where she was returned to her family.

In a statement issued on 12 June, Chechnya's Minister for National Politics, External Ties, and Information, Akhmed Dudayev, claimed that the security forces, and Taramova's, relatives, had not acted illegally. On 14 June, a video was aired on Chechen state television showing Taramova with her relatives saying that she does not remember how she ended up in the shelter in Dagestan and that she suffers from mental health issues.

On 13 June, the Russian LGBT Network filed a request for an investigation into Khalimat Taramova's abduction with the Chechen Republic Investigation Committee. They are additionally preparing a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) under Rule 39, requesting interim measures to protect Ms. Taramova.

Given the documented pattern of violations against LGBT+ people in Chechnya, including torture and 'honour killings' we are very concerned about Khalimat Taramova's physical safety.

This latest case is a reminder of the severe dangers faced by the LGBT+ community in Russia, and particularly in Chechnya.

Recommendations

TO THE AUTHORITIES OF CHECHNYA:

- Publicly confirm Khalimat Taramova's current state of health and whereabouts;
- Take steps to ensure she is not being held by her family against her will;
- Allow her to be visited by an attorney of her choice in the absence of parents and other relatives and ensure confidentiality of the meeting;

TO THE AUTHORITIES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION:

- Launch a swift and effective investigation into the circumstances of Khalimat Taramova's abduction in Dagestan and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- Take effective measures to fight against domestic violence and abuse of LGBT+ persons

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Continue to take measures to end abuse against LGBT+ persons and respect the human rights of sexual minorities in Russia.

Signatories:

The appeal has been signed by the following members of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP):

- International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
- Promo LEX Association, Moldova
- Bir Duino, Kyrgyzstan
- Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia
- Human Rights Center ZMINA (Ukraine)
- Human Rights Center "Memorial", Russia*
- Kazakhstan International Bureau on Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Kazakhstan
- Legal Policy Research Centre, Kazakhstan
- Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia
- Netherlands Helsinki Committee, The Netherlands
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
- World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), Brussels
- Public Association "Dignity", Kazakhstan
- The Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan
- The Human Rights Center (HRC), Georgia
- Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly- Vanadzor, Armenia
- humanrights.ch, Switzerland
- SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, Russia**
- Libereco Partnership of Human Rights, Germany
- Swedish OSCE-network
- Macedonian Helsinki Committee
- KRF Public Alternative, Ukraine

* "The Human Rights Center "Memorial" is entered by the Ministry of Justice into the register provided for in paragraph 10 of Art. 13.1 of the Federal Law "On Non-Commercial Organizations".

** "SOVA Center for Information and Analysis" is entered by the Ministry of Justice into the register provided for in paragraph 10 of Art. 13.1 of the Federal Law "On Non-Commercial Organizations".