The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Senior Dagestani Muslim Killed in a Hail of Bullets

By Natalya Krainova

June 08, 2011

A leading Muslim theologian and his nephew were slain in Makhachkala, mowed down in a hail of bullets, in apparent retaliation for his outspoken condemnation of fundamentalist Islam in the North Caucasus, police said Wednesday.

Maksud Sadikov, 47, head of the Dagestani Institute of Theology and International Relations, the first school to provide secular and religious higher education in the North Caucasus, was gunned down in a courtyard in the Dagestani capital at about 9:15 p.m. Tuesday, the regional Interior Ministry said. He was accompanied by his nephew, Zalimkhan Musayev, 24, who also died of his injuries at the scene.

The attackers fired 25 bullets at the two men, possibly from a traumatic gun found at the scene, the ministry said in a statement. Up to 19 bullets appeared to have hit the men, it said.

Sadikov was probably killed for his "professional activities — vigorous speaking against

the extremist trend in Islam," regional investigators said in a statement.

Sadikov received repeated work-related threats over the past six months, a Dagestani investigator told news site Lifenews.ru.

Ravil Gainutdin, head of the moderate Council of Muftis, which claims to represent Russia's Muslims and is relatively independent of the Kremlin, called Sadikov's death "a shot at the efforts of the authorities and society to promote peace and agreement in the Caucasus," Rosbalt news agency reported.

"All of us — ordinary citizens and authorities — must find new, more efficient methods to introduce stability to society," Gainutdin said.

The All-Russia Muftiyat, founded last year with Kremlin assistance to counter the Council of Muftis, described Sadikov as "an outspoken supporter of traditional educated Islam ... [who] strongly opposed the spread of Wahhabism and radicalism in the North Caucasus."

"Sadikov believed that the main tool in the fight with religious and political extremism is religious education," it said in a statement.

Russian Orthodox Church spokesman Vsevolod Chaplin called Sadikov "a friend of our church" who became a "victim of terrorists," Interfax reported.

Sadikov spearheaded the establishment of the theology institute, which dates back to at least 2005, the All-Russia Muftiyat said.

Investigators have opened a criminal case into the killings. Anyone convicted of murder faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Sadikov's death is the latest in a series of deadly attacks on moderate religious leaders in the North Caucasus in recent years.

In late April, a former Chechen imam, Nuri Ramazanov, was gunned down in Dagestan, state television Vesti reported at the time. No arrests have been reported, but investigators have linked the death to revenge by Islamist militants for his religious activities.

In early April, imam Magomed Saiputdinov was gunned down in the Kizlyar district of Dagestan.

In mid-December, the Kremlin-backed chief mufti of the Kabardino-Balkaria republic, Anas Pshikhachev, 43, was gunned down by unidentified assailants outside his house in Nalchik, the local capital.

Last June, imam Magomed Kazakbiyev died after unidentified gunmen opened fire on worshippers on their way to a mosque in the outskirts of Makhachkala.

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