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# Hilary Swank Regrets Grozny Visit

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Hollywood star Hilary Swank on Thursday became the first foreign celebrity to express regret over appearing in front of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov at last week's Grozny City Day celebrations.

"I deeply regret attending this event," Swank said in a written message, The Associated Press reported. "If I had a full understanding of what this event was apparently intended to be, I would never have gone."

Spokespeople for the actress did not reply to calls and e-mailed requests for comment Thursday.

Swank, who won her second Oscar for playing a boxer in Clint Eastwood's 2004 film "Million Dollar Baby," was one of four foreign artists who appeared at the lavish Oct. 5 gala in front of a large audience of officials in the Chechen capital.

She and the others — Belgian actor Jean-Claude van Damme, British singer Seal and violinist

Vanessa-Mae — were accused by human rights groups of legitimizing the rule of Kadyrov, who they accuse of human rights violations.

The party, officially labeled as the opening of a business center, coincided with Kadyrov's 35th birthday. The Chechen leader, widely accused of running a personality cult, earlier publicly forbade any birthday celebrations.

In footage available online, Swank stands on the stage and says, "Happy birthday, Mr. President." The presenter then asks in reply, "How do you know?" and she says, "I read. I do my research."

Before the festivities, human rights groups sent letters to the stars reported to have agreed to attend, asking them to decline the invitation.

Swank's manager Jason Weinberg told the New York-based Human Rights Foundation in an e-mail in September that the actress would not attend, the organization said on its web site.

On Wednesday, Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group, called on all celebrities who attended not to keep any money or gifts they had received.

While the other stars have remained silent on the allegations, Seal was defiant in a Twitter post dated Oct. 8.

"By going there I played MUSIC for the Chechenyan [sic] people. I'm a MUSICIAN and would appreciate if you leave me out of your politics," the singer said.

Seal and his management did not respond to questions sent by e-mail and Twitter, but early Thursday the singer did engage in a heated exchange with another Twitter user.

"You're a coward & a joke," @BrianSpadora, a blogger from New Jersey, wrote in reply to Seal's Oct. 8 explanation.

The singer's reaction was just as harsh. "And you are a hypocrite!" he wrote in reply. "You sit there under your umbrella of democracy and never once stop to think how it keeps you dry!"

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