The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Kadyrov Leads Olympic Torch Relay in Chechnya

By Christopher Brennan

January 28, 2014



Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov carries an Olympic torch on Monday. **Musa Sadulayev**

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov was among those that carried the Olympic torch through Grozny on Tuesday as it made its way through the southern Russian republic en route to Sochi.

Kadryov chronicled the preparations for the event on his Instagram account and shared a video of the ceremony, lauding security measures for the relay and the attendance of, in his estimate, 70,000 Chechens.

The Olympic flame traveled through the republic of Dagestan on Monday, beginning a journey into regions of Russia's North Caucasus that have historically struggled against separatist movements and Islamic extremists.

Officials shortened the route through Dagestan's capital Makhachkala after an extremist

group from the region claimed responsibility for suicide bombings that killed 34 people in the southern city of Volgograd in December, Caucasian Knot reported. The same group had said in a YouTube video that there was already a "present" waiting in Sochi for the upcoming Winter Olympics.

The route through Grozny was also shortened and ended in the city's stadium, which is named after Kadyrov's father, Akhmed — a former president of Chechnya who was assassinated in 2004.

Kadyrov said last week that Chechens would be rooting for the Russian Winter Olympic team. "We are Russians and will prove it with our acts and deeds," Kadyrov said, the region's press service.

The relay through Grozny came on the same day that an extensive interview with Kadyrov that covered a broad range of issues was published in the Moscow newspaper Izvestia. Kadyrov paid particular attention to the issue of nationalism, which is often directed against ethnic Caucasians who have moved to other Russian regions.

The Chechen leader, who was appointed by President Vladimir Putin in 2007, said that interethnic conflicts were no less a threat to the country than terrorism and added that "everyone who goes to nationalist rallies needs to be put away."

In the interview, Kadyrov reiterated that the leader of the radical Islamist Caucasus Emirate organization, Doku Umarov, was killed in a military operation in Chechnya two months ago. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev told CNN last week that Umarov, who called for terrorist attacks against the Sochi Olympics, should be considered alive until there is firm evidence of his death.

The Olympic torch relay will continue on to the republic of Ingushetia as it heads toward the Games' opening ceremony on Feb. 7.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/01/28/kadyrov-leads-olympic-torch-relay-in-chechnya-a31520