The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Deputy Muslim Leader of North Ossetia Shot to Death

By Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

August 17, 2014



The Mukhtarov Mosque stands on the left bank of the Terek River in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia republic.

The deputy mufti of Russia's North Ossetia republic was shot dead Saturday in the latest in a string of assassinations of Muslim leaders in the North Caucasus this year.

Rasul Gamzatov, who served as the imam of a mosque in the regional capital Vladikavkaz, was shot at least seven times in the head and chest at the entrance of an apartment building in the city shortly before midnight, the Investigative Committee said Sunday.

The committee said in a statement that it would investigate different possible motives for the crime, including whether the murder could be linked to Gamzatov's professional activities.

Gamzatov's predecessor as deputy mufti of North Ossetia, Ibragim Dudarov, was also shot and killed by an identified assassin on the outskirts of Vladikavkaz in December 2012. The case

remains unresolved.

The mufti of North Ossetia, Khadzhimurat Gatsalov, said Sunday that the murders of his two deputies were most likely connected.

"Why is the murder of the first imam not being investigated?" Interfax quoted Gatsalov as saying."Who benefits from killing devout Muslims? This was done by people who want to spread discord in our republic. We have no militants [here] and they do not come here from other places."

North Ossetia is less restive than other parts of the North Caucasus region such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, where attacks on police and officials by Islamic militants are a common occurrence. A total of 96 people were killed as a result of armed conflict in the North Caucasus in the second quarter of this year, according to Kavkazsky Uzel, a regional online news portal. None of these deaths were recorded in North Ossetia.

The president of North Ossetia, Taimuraz Mamsurov, said he thought Gamzatov's assassination could have religious motives.

"We will only be able to establish the motives for the crime when the criminals are apprehended and testify," Mamsurov said, according to Interfax. "This is either an attempt to destabilize the republic or to create artificial strife between our traditional religions — Islam and Christianity — which have coexisted in peace and harmony in the North Caucasus for centuries."

Gamzatov's murder was the fourth killing of a religious figure in the North Caucasus this year, bringing the total number of such killings in the region since 2009 to 39, according to Kavkazsky Uzel.

Many of those murders have been tied to their views on Islam, which extremists deem too moderate.

See also:

Police Detain Members of North Ossetian Mafia in Moscow

Contact the author at g.tetraultfarber@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/08/17/deputy-muslim-leader-of-north-ossetia-shot-to-death-a38412