

Kadyrov's Spokesman Denies Stories of Midnight Interrogations Over Missing Phone

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A spokesman for Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov on Tuesday denied a report by a human rights group that more than a 1,000 people had been questioned over a missing phone belonging to the southern Russian republic's head.

The Russian blogosphere was buzzing with the story Tuesday after rights group Memorial said Friday that Kadyrov had lost his phone at a museum opening in a Chechen village. Guests at the official opening of the ethnography museum complex were first asked via loudspeakers if anybody had found the gadget, Memorial said.

After that attempt to find the phone proved futile and guests went home, Kadyrov's security service obtained a list of those who were invited, the group said.

According to Memorial, which closed its office in Chechnya in 2009, security officers called in more than 1,000 people who had attended the ceremony — including minors —

for questioning on Saturday night, with many detained until the following morning.

They were asked where they had been standing and whether they had found the phone or any other missing items, the group said in a statement.

The report was widely discussed on social networks in Russia, eliciting a variety of satirical comments from web users.

On Tuesday, Kadyrov's spokesperson Alvi Karimov denied that his boss had lost his phone at all.

"This is all a lie. Ramzan Akhmetovich has two phones, and both of them are on his desk," Karimov told Interfax.

Memorial has frequently blamed Kadyrov and his subordinates for abductions in Chechnya. Kadyrov has in turn accused Memorial of being financed by the West to do "dirty work."

Memorial head Oleg Orlov publicly accused Kadyrov of being involved in the murder of one of the group's activists, Natalia Estemirova, who was found dead after being abducted from Chechnya in 2009. The rights group closed its office in Chechnya following the murder.

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