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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Office of Russian Anti-Torture NGO Attacked in Chechen Capital

By The Moscow Times

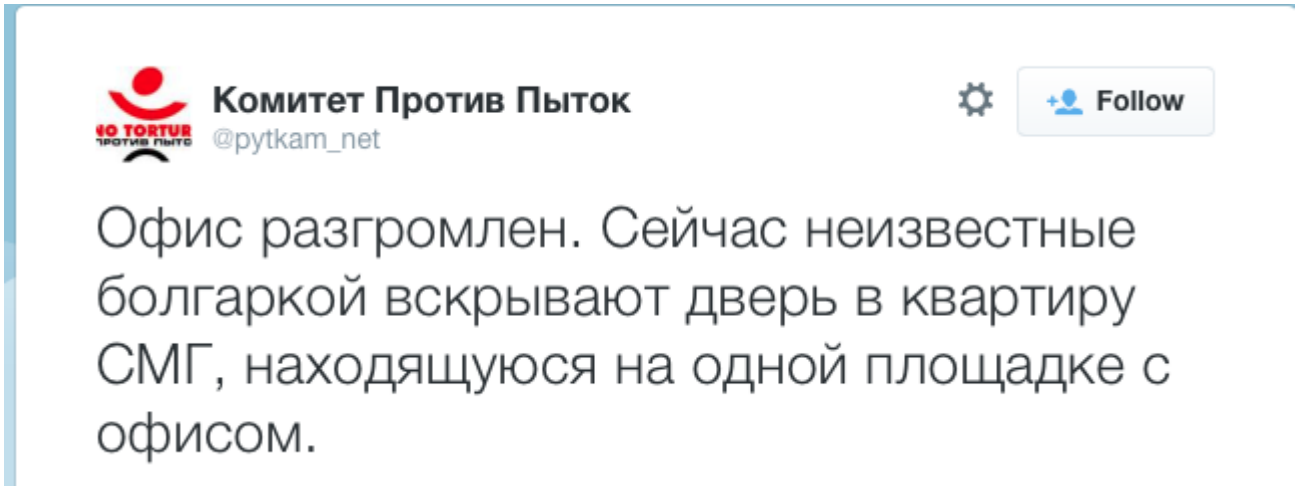
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Masked men stormed the Grozny office of the Committee Against Torture, a prominent human rights NGO, on Wednesday morning, the organization said via its Twitter account.

The Committee Against Torture wrote on its official Twitter page Wednesday that masked men had vandalized its vehicle and broke down the door to its office. Other members of a mob that had gathered near the office climbed onto its balcony and tried to break a window, the NGO said.

The men vandalized the office as the organization's employees escaped through a window.



A video reportedly taken at the scene shows a crowd of protesters cheering on a masked young man breaking what seems to be a security camera above the office's balcony. Gunshots could also be heard.

No police units were dispatched to the scene, according to the Committee Against Torture.

The head of the organization, human rights activist Igor Kalyapin, said he had informed Mikhail Fedotov, the Chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, about the incident, the NGO wrote on Twitter.

Chechen authorities had announced earlier that an event protesting the "information war" being waged against Russia and Chechnya would take place on Wednesday. The Novaya Gazeta investigative newspaper reported Wednesday that information about the planned protest had been deleted from nearly all the republic's official websites.

The paper also reported the authorities had later announced that instead of a protest against the media, a demonstration would be held to show solidarity for Dzhambulat Dadayev, a Chechen man wanted by the federal authorities who was shot dead in Chechnya in April by law enforcement officers from the Stavropol region..

The Committee Against Torture was founded in 2000 by rights activists from the city of Nizhny Novgorod and monitors cases of torture and violent treatment in Russia. The organization also offers legal and medical support to victims of torture.

In January, the Committee Against Torture was added to the Justice Ministry's registry of "foreign agents," a list of NGOs that engage in broadly defined political activity and receive foreign funding. In the Soviet era, the label "foreign agent" was widely considered to be synonymous with spy.

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