

# Salary Payment Problems Abound in Russia's Chechen Republic

January 28, 2016



Employees of a state-run organization in Russia's republic of Chechnya have been receiving less than one-third of their salaries since May 2015, but have been reluctant to file complaints to local officials for fear of retribution, Memorial human rights group said in a report Wednesday.

Families of employees of a social service agency in Chechnya's Shelkovsky district have appealed to Memorial, saying they have been paid 30 percent of their nominal salaries — or less than the minimum wage, the report said.

The agency's accounting department has allegedly been running dual payrolls, having workers sign for receiving 30 percent of their wages, and falsifying signatures for the remaining 70 percent, according to claims by employees who complained to Memorial, the human rights group reported.

“All employees of the state-run organization know about this, but do not turn to law enforcement agencies, fearing that they would incur the ire of their bosses,” Memorial said in its report.

Payments were slashed when the job of running the Shelkovsky district's labor and social development department was given last May to Khedi Geremeyeva — the sister of Ruslan Geremeyev, a military commander who has been linked to last year's murder of Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov — Memorial said in its report.

The influential Geremeyev clan also includes Federation Council senator Suleyman Geremeyev and the head of the Shelkovsky district's Interior Ministry branch, Vakha Geremeyev, according to media reports.

The administration of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has repeatedly been accused of collecting off-the-book fees from local residents.

A documentary released by the pro-democracy Open Russia foundation last year claimed that all of Chechnya's government employees pay out 10 percent of their salaries each month to the Akhmad Kadyrov Foundation — named after the current Chechen leader's father and former chief of the republic.

Employees of private companies pay out 30 percent, while entrepreneurs pay out up to 50 percent of their earnings each month, according to the Open Russia documentary titled “The Family.”

Chechnya's government-run “Grozny” television responded by releasing its own film, denouncing Open Russia's documentary as a “continuous parade of goofs.”

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