

Russian Newspaper Demands Government Protection From Chechen Religious Fanatics

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP

In an [open letter](#) published on Thursday, the newspaper Novaya Gazeta is calling on the Russian government to respond to violent threats against its reporters from religious figures in Chechnya.

On April 3, three days after Novaya Gazeta broke a [major story](#) about gay men being abducted by Chechen police, Islamic leaders gathered 24 religious figures and roughly 15,000 worshippers in downtown Grozny. Speaking to the crowd, Adam Shakhidov, an advisor to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, publicly denounced Novaya Gazeta's reporters as "enemies of our faith and of our motherland."

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The event was broadcast on television throughout Russia's predominantly Muslim North Caucasus, and discussed widely on the Internet, provoking a wave of threats and hate speech online.

Before the April 3 gathering ended, the religious leaders adopted a [resolution](#), the second article of which implicitly calls for violence against Novaya Gazeta's staff.

Article 2 of the resolution reads, "In view of the insult to the centuries-old foundations of Chechen society and the dignity of Chechen men, and also to our faith, we vow that retribution will catch up to the true instigators, wherever they are and whoever they are, no matter how long it takes."

Novaya Gazeta editors say this is a signal to religious fanatics to "massacre journalists." The newspaper is asking Russian law enforcement to "do everything possible to halt actions aimed at inciting hatred against journalists."

Related article: [Novaya Gazeta, One of Russia's Last Critical Papers, May Go Out of Print](#)

On April 1, Novaya Gazeta published a bombshell investigation revealing a startling crackdown on gay men in Chechnya, finding that the local authorities have brutally detained more than 100 men, some of whom they've even executed.

Eleven days after the report was published, Andrei Sabinin, a lawyer with the Agora human rights group, filed a lawsuit against Russia's Federal Investigative Committee for failing to respond to the evidence of a major crime on Russian soil. Three days earlier, Novaya Gazeta chief editor Dmitry Muratov formally appealed to Russia's Prosecutor General's Office, also requesting an investigation into the allegations against Chechen officials.

In October 2006, Anna Politkovskaya, Novaya Gazeta's most famous investigative correspondent, was murdered in the elevator of her apartment building. The assassination attracted international attention. In May 2014, five men were convicted of killing Politkovskaya, including three Chechen brothers who had been acquitted in a previous trial, though it remains unknown who ordered the murder. Politkovskaya was best known for reporting human rights violations in Chechnya.

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