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Putin Promises to Raise Chechnya's Anti-Gay Crackdown With Law Enforcement

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Vladimir Putin, left, meets with Chechen regional leader Ramzan Kadyrov in the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia. The leader of Chechnya says gay men do not exist in his republic and dismisses reports that 100 gay men have been rounded up, tortured and sometimes killed. **Mikhail Klimentyev, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP, File**

Russian President Vladimir Putin will raise the issue of Chechnya's violent crackdown on gay men with state law enforcement agencies, according to information on the Kremlin website. The promise came during a meeting with Human Rights Ombudswoman Tatyana Moskalkova.

The president's comment represents a tacit admission that the federal authorities cannot depend on their Chechen counterparts to independently investigate reports of detentions of gay men.

Putin met with Moskalkova today to receive a copy of Russia's annual human rights report

May 5. During the meeting, the ombudswoman said she filed several petitions with Russian law enforcement to investigate complaints that Chechen authorities were violating the rights of gay men. She then asked Putin to "order the creation of an interagency working group" in Moscow, "not in Chechnya," that could accept complaints from Russian citizens.

Investigating the accusations has been complicated by the fact that "people aren't ready to state their name," Moskalkova said. But Russian law allows victims and witnesses to report crimes confidentially, she added.

In response, Putin promised to speak with the State Prosecutor and Interior Ministry "so that they support you in the areas you have just raised," according to a transcript of the discussion.

Related article: Detained, Tortured, Killed: How Chechnya Cracked Down on Gays

Last month, Russia's Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported that Chechnya had launched a massive crackdown on gay men in early 2017. Chechen security forces had kidnapped and tortured at least 100 suspected gay men and killed at least three, the newspaper reported. The shocking story provoked outrage around the world.

Russia's official response has been lukewarm at best. Chechen officials have outright denied the accusations, even going so far as to call the reports "slanderous." They suggested that gay people do not exist in the conservative, Muslim-majority North Caucasus republic.

On April 17, the Chechen prosecutor's office launched an investigation into Novaya Gazeta's accusations, a moved that inspired little public confidence.

Despite this, a week later, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the Russian authorities had "no reason to doubt" Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya's longtime ruler, when he denied his police are terrorizing gay men.

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