

Human Rights Official Moskalkova Says Chechnya Investigating 18 Kidnapping Cases

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Valery Matytsin / TASS

Chechen authorities have opened criminal cases into the disappearance of 18 people in the North Caucasus republic, Russia's chief human rights ombudswoman [told the state-run TASS news agency on Wednesday](#).

[A Novaya Gazeta investigative newspaper report in April](#) claimed that dozens of gay men in Chechnya had been held and tortured in secret prisons as part of a massive anti-gay crackdown. Russia's State Prosecutor's Office said at the time that its Chechen branch launched an investigation into the reports of mass arrests.

The Russian LGBT Network [published a report last month](#) alleging at least 200 men had been detained and tortured because of their sexual orientation. The report said the Chechen security forces killed at least 20 detainees.

Human rights ombudswoman Tatyana Moskalkova, visiting the Chechen capital of Grozny on Tuesday, was [quoted as saying by TASS](#) that high-ranking law-enforcement officials had indicated that two people claimed to be dead by Novaya Gazeta turned out to be alive. She added that officials agreed to allow her to see them.

“There is information that several other people have died and I asked them to show me their graves,” Moskalkova also told reporters.

Moskalkova said she also planned to verify law enforcement claims that two people had died of natural causes.

Last July, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov [dismissed reports on the persecution of gay men in the conservative, Muslim-majority republic](#). “The reports are nonsense,” Kadyrov told the U.S. cable network HBO in an interview. “We don’t have any gays.”

The Kremlin, [commenting on Kadyrov’s calls for the removal of gay people from Chechnya](#) during that interview, claimed that the Chechen leader said “nothing out of the ordinary.”

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