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Men Shown as Proof of Life by Officials Were Actually Missing Chechens' Brothers

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Ruslan Kasumov / TASS

The men presented to Russia's human rights ombudswoman as evidence that two missing Chechens are alive are their brothers, the human rights group Memorial says.

Tatyana Moskalkova traveled to Chechnya in mid-September to investigate the alleged disappearance of more than 30 men in an anti-gay purge first reported by the Novaya Gazeta newspaper in April.

The report claimed that dozens of gay men in the North Caucasus republic had been held and tortured in secret prisons. The Russian LGBT Network in August said that at least 200 men had been detained and tortured and at least 20 killed because of their sexual orientation.

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Moskalkova was shown two people claimed to be dead by Novaya Gazeta, Shamkhan Yusupov and Makhmu Muskiyev, by local officials.

An official statement on the Chechen government's website quoted Moskalkova as saying that she had "verified all data" demonstrating that the men were alive. But according to Memorial the two men were in fact the brothers of the two missing men, whose fates remain unknown.

Memorial said that Chechen law enforcement officials threatened the family members of 27 men listed as missing if they confirmed the disappearances to Moskalkova.

It also questioned the authenticity of two graves of people described as having died from natural causes visited by Moskalkova's delegation.

However, Memorial disputed the claim in Novaya Gazeta's investigative report that the people were killed as part of an anti-gay clampdown, describing them as targets of an anti-terror sweep. "Everyone on this list was suspected of being part of illegal armed groups or links to them," it said.

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