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Investigators to Open Case Into Gay Chechen Purge

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im Lapunov, a Russian man who is accusing authorities in Chechnya of brutally beating him as part of a broad crackdown on gay people in the Russian Region (Pavel Golovkin / AP / TASS)

Chechen investigators are pursuing a gay man's allegations that he was tortured by police because of his sexual orientation, the Interfax news agency reported.

Dozens of gay men are believed to have fled the Muslim-majority region in the Russian North Caucasus amid reports of a government led crackdown. Both Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and the Kremlin deny claims of any systematic suppression of gay men.

Maxim Lapunov is the first man in Russia to publicly charge that local police detained and tortured him in Chechnya early last year.

His testimony comes after the investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported earlier this year that more than 100 gay men were detained and tortured in the region.

Tatyana Mokalkova, Russia's human rights ombudswoman, has vowed to oversee that

Lapunov's allegations are properly investigated.

Moskalkova told reporters on Wednesday that she personally inspected investigative materials in the North Caucasus police department because of what she described as foot-dragging by local authorities.

“I believe there are grounds to open a criminal case and provide state protection to Maxim Lapunov,” she said cited by state-run TASS news agency.

Moskalkova told journalists on Wednesday that local investigators reversed an earlier decision not to investigate the victim’s allegations, Interfax reports.

“Questions were raised about finding the witnesses that Lapunov is pointing to, and who I believe haven’t yet been found because of the investigators’ insufficient activity,” Moskalkova said.

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