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First Chechen to Come Out as Gay Says Public Apology Was Forced

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Movsar Eskershanov (r) / Screenshot Grozny TV

The first Chechen man to come out as gay has said that he was forced to issue an apology to the leader and people of Chechnya last month after receiving threats to his family.

Movsar Eskarkhanov apologized on Chechen state television in November for telling Time magazine that he was persecuted for being gay in the republic.

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"They made it clear that if I continue to talk, there would be problems," Eskarkhanov was cited as saying in an interview with the Kavkazsky Uzel news website on Monday.

In his Nov. 13 apology, Eskarkhanov said that his coming-out was made under the influence of epilepsy medication. His account followed a Russian investigative newspaper report earlier

this year of a large-scale crackdown on gay men in Chechnya.

"They said that I must first think about my family. I was also told that if I continue to speak again, I would have problems," Eskarkhanov was cited as saying by the international Russian-language channel RTVI.

Chechens who lose favor with republic leader Ramzan Kadyrov regularly appear on television to make public apologies. Human Right Watch reported last year that several Chechens who went against the authorities were later forced to publicly apologize to local leadership.

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