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Chechnya Initiated Brutal Crackdown on Drugs Last Year, Investigation Says

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Anton Podgaiko / TASS

Authorities in Chechnya reportedly launched a brutal crackdown against drug suspects last August on the orders of the region's leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Allegations of torture in the North Caucasus republic surfaced early last year when an investigative newspaper reported that more than 100 gay men were detained and tortured in secret Chechen prisons. Both Kadyrov and the Kremlin have denied the claims.

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

A new investigation by the Republic.ru news website published on Tuesday says that Chechen authorities resorted to torture in an anti-drug campaign in which more than 70 people were arrested last August on the orders of Kadyrov.

One of the men detained in the August crackdown filed a complaint to Russian federal authorities about his torture under the custody of Chechen police, the website reported.

“I was screaming, it hurt a lot. Yet special agents said they would torture me until I agreed to sign a confession,” the Republic cited Magomed-Ali Mezhidov, 31, as writing in his complaint to the prosecutor’s office.

“The officers told me that I didn’t have a choice, that I would have to confess anyway or they would fabricate a ‘terrorism’ charge against me [...] and then they could then do anything they wanted with me,” he wrote.

A source close to Chechen law enforcement was cited by the republic as saying that the arrested suspects were coerced into confessing to using drugs. He said the majority of the torture cases occurred in late October and early November.

Local police told the Republic that 507 drug abuse cases were uncovered in 2017.

“The hands of law enforcement bodies are untied because they understand they’re following orders,” another law enforcement source was cited as saying.

Chechen police denied the torture allegations against Mezhidov in a statement published on Tuesday.

Chechnya head Ramzan Kadyrov has previously said that violators of the peace in Chechnya should be “shot to hell" and that drug abuse and terrorism were "equal evils."

“It doesn’t matter at all if it’s legal or illegal... Shoot them! Got it? As-salamu alaikum and the problem’s fixed. That will be the law then!” he was cited as saying at a televised meeting in 2016.

The latest claims of torture come a week after the drug-related arrest of Oyub Titiyev, the head of the Chechen Memorial human rights group. Titiyev’s supporters say the charges against him were fabricated for political reasons.

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