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OSCE Calls on Russia to Investigate 'Grave' Rights Abuses in Chechnya

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Ramzan Kadyrov (Yelena Afonina / TASS)

Europe's OSCE security body has accused Russia of shielding human rights abusers in its southern republic of Chechnya instead of investigating accusations of extrajudicial killings.

Chechen authorities led by Ramzan Kadyrov have been accused of kidnapping and torturing suspected jihadists, drug users, activists and sexual minorities. An investigation into the claims by the Novaya Gazeta newspaper in January 2017 named 27 Chechens it said were subjected to extrajudicial killings in the North Caucasus republic.

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said in a report Thursday

that "[t]here can hardly be any doubt" that allegations of widespread human rights violations in Chechnya are credible, based on interviews with victims, witnesses, lawyers and local and international organizations.

"However, no evidence could be found about cases where law enforcement officers were brought to justice," it said.

The report recommended to "establish a special investigative committee" to probe the allegations, a move welcomed by the 16 nations that called in November for the OSCE investigation, including the United States, Canada and EU member states.

The report by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) comes less than a week after a court in southern Russia upheld a decision to not investigate the alleged 27 extrajudicial killings.

A senior member of the U.S. mission to the OSCE said the 16 countries that called for the investigation "will remain seized of the horrific human rights situation" and keep pressing Russia to "end impunity in Chechnya."

"We urge Russia to muster the political will to do so," acting deputy chief of mission Gregory Macris told the OSCE's permanent council in Vienna on Thursday.

Moscow's emailed response declining the OSCE rapporteur's request to visit Russia to draft the report called the accusations of rights abuses in Chechnya "biased and groundless." Russia declined to appoint a second expert and called the OSCE's so-called human dimension mechanisms "outdated and redundant."

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