The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

2 Gay Men Returned to Chechnya Face 'Mortal Danger': Rights Group

By AFP

February 06, 2021



Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has said there are no homosexuals in the region. **TASS**

Two gay men seized near Moscow this week and sent back to their native Chechnya, a region accused of brutal persecution against homosexuality, face "mortal danger," a rights group said Saturday.

The LGBT Network rights group helped the two Chechen men, Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isayev, flee Chechnya for Nizhny Novgorod east of Moscow in June last year after they were reportedly tortured by Chechen special police.

Related article: Russia Returns Escaped Gay Men to Chechen Police – NGO

The two men were detained for unknown reasons in Nizhny Novgorod on Thursday and have been sent back to the North Caucasus region, the group said in a statement.

LGBT Network spokesman Tim Bestsvet said the men were detained by the FSB domestic intelligence agency and had arrived at a police station in Chechen town of Gudermes on Saturday.

"They are tired and frightened," he told AFP on Saturday.

"All this time they were being pressured to refuse a lawyer," Bestsvet said, adding that a lawyer with the LGBT Network was in Gudermes trying to get access to the men.

"There have been cases when relatives brought back to Chechnya people that we had evacuated and then these people would die or, we can say, were probably murdered," Bestsvet said, adding that Magamadov and Isayev faced "mortal danger."

The Interior Ministry's Chechnya branch and the Federal Security Service (FSB) were not immediately available for comment Saturday.

While Magamadov is older than 18, Bestsvet said that because Isayev is 17 he can only refuse legal representation via his parents.

He added that Isayev's father was brought to the police station on Saturday and was facing pressure to refuse to let his son have an attorney.

Magamadov and Isayev were arrested and tortured by Chechen special police in April 2020, officially for running an opposition Telegram channel, but "initially because of their sexual orientation," said Bestsvet.

The two men later recorded a video apology in which they said "they weren't men," before the LGBT Network helped them flee, Bestsvet said.

Russia's volatile republic of Chechnya has been under fire over alleged gay persecution since 2017, when gay men said they were tortured by law enforcement agencies.

In 2019, the LGBT Network reported a second wave of persecution against gay people in the majority Muslim region, including two murders.

Chechen officials regularly dismiss the reports as "made up" and strongman chief Ramzan Kadyrov claims the region's population is exclusively heterosexual.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/02/06/two-gay-men-returned-to-chechnya-face-mortal-danger-rights-group-a72852