The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

'Unprecedented' Video Leak Shows Rampant Torture at Russian Prisons – NGO

By Pjotr Sauer

October 06, 2021



Yevgeny Yepanchintsev / TASS

A prominent NGO that tracks abuses in Russia's prison system says it has received "thousands" of leaked video clips showing inmates being beaten and tortured by guards in several prisons across the country.

"This is an unprecedented leak that will send shockwaves across the country. In total we have over 40 gigabytes of files showing widespread torture," Vladimir Osechkin, the founder of the Gulagu.net rights group, told The Moscow Times in a phone interview.

Related article: Russia Promises UN to End Prison Torture

The Mediazona news website on Tuesday published three of the videos obtained by Gulagu.net

that reportedly show inmates being tortured at a prison hospital in the Volga city of Saratov.

The Kremlin on Tuesday said it was aware of the footage at the Saratov prison hospital and that the Federal Prison Service (FSIN) has launched a probe into the videos.

“If this is confirmed, it will lead to a very serious inquiry,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told journalists Tuesday.

On Wednesday, Gulagu.net published on its Youtube channel new footage reportedely showing prisoners being beaten and tortured. Gulagu.net said the footage was made at the prison hospital in Saratov and at prisons in the Belgorod and Kamchatka regions.

Later on Wednesday the Federal Prison Service (FSIN) announced that it had fired the head of the Saratov prison service, along with three regional staff and the head doctor of the prison.

Gulagu.net also shared footage allegedly recorded at the same Saratov prison with The Moscow Times that shows several people using a large object to rape a naked man who is tied to a bed.

The Moscow Times was unable to independently verify the content.

According to Osechnkin, his organization started receiving the leaked footage in March from a former inmate at the Saratov prison who was released in February of this year.

Osechkin said the inmate was a Belarusian IT specialist who reportedly gained access to footage stored in the prison's computers that were shot in several prisons in the Irkutsk, Vladimir and Saratov regions between 2018-2020.

He said the whistleblower left Russia earlier this week, declining to reveal his location out of fear for his safety.

“We are planning to release batches of the videos step by step in the coming weeks now that the source is out of the reach of the Russian authorities,” Osechkin said.

Gulagu.net has also sent the videos to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). CPT did not immediately respond to The Moscow Times’ request for comment.

Osechkin founded the Gulagu.net human rights organization in 2011 to monitor violations of prison inmates' rights across Russia. He left Russia in 2015 and currently resides in France.

Gulagu.net’s website was blocked by Russia’s state media watchdog Roskomnadzor in July following requests from the FSB and FSIN.

Tanya Lokshina, associate Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said that while HRW was not in a position to verify the videos, the footage “gave grounds for strong concern.”

“The problem of torture in Russian penitentiaries is very acute and the government is not doing enough to ensure effective investigation, security of victims and whistleblowers and

accountability for perpetrators," Lokshina said.

Russia, alongside Turkey, ranks amongst the countries with the highest proportion of incarcerated people in Europe, according to a recent report by the Council of Europe.

Human rights groups have repeatedly slammed Russia's "systematic" torture of its inmates.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/10/06/unprecedented-video-leak-shows-rampant-torture-at-russian-prisons-ngo-a75218