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Russian Police Detain, Return Dagestani Women Fleeing Abuse

By Uliana Pavlova

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Activists say the women's rights situation in Dagestan is critical. **AP / TASS**

Russian police detained and returned two women Monday who attempted to flee their families in Dagestan, a women's rights activist told The Moscow Times.

Authorities in the central city of Kazan detained two 20-year-old women from a women's shelter in the city without explanation, the shelter's program manager Alsu Krivel told The Moscow Times.

The women had arrived at the shelter earlier Monday, having fled an abusive environment in their households in Dagestan, a Muslim-majority republic in Russia's North Caucasus, Krivel added. She said that their relatives hold positions of power in Dagestan, and suspected this played a role in the cooperation of authorities in Kazan to apprehend the women and facilitate their return.

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One of the women had her 2-year-old daughter with her at the time, Krivel said.

'They found us'

The two women came to Kazan early Monday morning and by 3:00 p.m. were moved into one of the shelter's residences, Krivel told The Moscow Times in a telephone interview.

"Another women's shelter in Dagestan reached out and asked us to take them since they were in danger of being found in Dagestan. We put them in one of our residences, the location of which is secret."

However, Kazan's local police located and detained the women at 8:00 p.m. Monday evening and within hours they had been returned to their families.

"The Ministry of Internal Affairs told us that the girls disclosed their location to their family members themselves," Krivel said.

Hours after their release, a video was posted on social media in which the women said that they were safe at their relatives' house. The video has since been deleted.

The last text message that the shelter received from one of the women said: "They found us, the police are at the shelter."

"Since then no one has heard from them," Krivel told The Moscow Times.

Russian human rights groups have repeatedly highlighted dangerous conditions facing women in Russia's conservative North Caucasus republics, which include Chechnya and Dagestan. In June 2020, activists told the United Nations that the situation was critical, with domestic violence, so-called honor killings and female genital mutilation prevalent throughout the region.

Journalists and rights groups covering women's issues in Dagestan and across the North Caucasus say they routinely face threats, intimidation and violence.

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