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Russian Lawmaker Threatens to 'Cut the Heads Off' Chechen Activist's Family

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Russian State Duma deputy Adam Delimkhanov. **Yelena Afonina / TASS**

A Russian lawmaker on Tuesday threatened to decapitate the family members of Chechen lawyer and anti-torture activist Abubakar Yangulbaev.

Yangulbaev's father — a retired federal judge — and sister fled Russia on Jan. 23 after the activist's mother Zarema Musaeva was violently detained in western Russia and forcibly brought to Chechnya.

"We will pursue you until we cut off your heads and kill you," Adam Delimkhanov, a ruling party deputy in Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, said in an Instagram video.

"This also applies to those who translate this video into Russian," Delimkhanov said, according to a translation from his native Chechen language cited by The Insider news website.

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Yangulbaev told The Insider that he takes Delimkhanov's threats seriously.

"It's astonishing to hear this from a person who has to make laws so that people in Russia live well," he said.

"I don't know if there will be a response from the Russian Investigative Committee at all. I'm starting to doubt it already," Yangulbaev added, referring to Russia's law enforcement body that handles major criminal probes.

Delimkhanov, a close ally of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, is under United States sanctions and is wanted in Dubai in connection with the 2009 murder of a Chechen general.

In a follow-up video posted on Chechen deputy prime minister Abuzayed Vismuradov's Instagram account, five senior Chechen government, security and law enforcement officials backed Delimkhanov's threat, saying: "There's no job more important than to find you and cut off your heads."

Videos appeared online later Wednesday showing what authorities called a 400,000-person rally against the Yangulbaev family in Grozny, Chechnya's administrative center.

Kadyrov himself has called on countries to return the Yangulbaev family to Russia, saying "shielding them means supporting terrorists."

Last month, Kadyrov threatened the Yangulbaev family with "jail or burial."

Musaeva was initially detained in Nizhny Novgorod on Jan. 20 on orders to appear as a witness in a fraud case. She is now reportedly accused of assaulting the authorities, a criminal offense that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

Reports on Wednesday said that a Chechen court placed Musaeva in pre-trial detention for two months on the assault charges.

Amnesty International called for her immediate release.

Abubakar Yangulbaev's brother Ibragim was charged with public calls to commit terrorist activities, a crime punishable by five to seven years in prison.

The Kremlin has declined to get involved in the case, calling Kadyrov's threats against the Yangulbaev family his "personal opinion." On Wednesday, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Duma's ethics committee and the ruling United Russia party need to react to Delimkhanov's threats.

A senior member of the Duma's ethics committee has called on federal prosecutors to probe Delimkhanov's comments.

"This threat is no joke," Nikolai Arefyev was quoted as saying by Interfax on Wednesday.

"Such a person is a danger to society [and] needs to be controlled," Arefyev said.

Human rights organizations accuse Kadyrov of overseeing widespread abuses including torture and quashing dissent in Chechnya.

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