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Chechen Authorities Using Threats and Blackmail to Recruit Soldiers for Ukraine – Investigation

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A review of the Chechen Republic's troops and military hardware at the residence of Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic. **Elena Afonina / TASS**

Authorities in the Russian republic of Chechnya are forcing local men to join "volunteer" battalions for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, investigative news outlet The Insider reported Wednesday.

Soldiers have reported the use of intimidation, blackmail, or threats of torture and kidnapping against their loved ones, according to The Insider's sources.

While the exact number of cases is unknown, local human rights organization Vayfond said it has received at least 50 requests related to forced mobilization. Chechen blogger Islam Belokiev told The Insider that he learns of at least three such stories each day.

"We have a lot of messages about Chechens being forcibly sent to [fight in] the war," Ibragim

Yangulbayev, leader of regional opposition movement 1ADAT, told the outlet.

“People imprisoned on fabricated criminal charges are offered the chance to sign a contract with the armed forces. The police promise to release them if they agree.”

Yangulbayev claims that local officials maintain lists of “extremists” — those who don’t support regional leader Ramzan Kadyrov — whom they target in forced mobilization campaigns.

Some officials reportedly kidnap potential soldiers and try to extort money from their families, or threaten to rape or torture the family members of recruits to force them into the army.

Ramzan Kadyrov has repeatedly boasted on social media about the enthusiasm and high morale of Chechen fighters in Ukraine.

But the families of “volunteers” who have been killed or wounded receive limited or no help from the authorities, The Insider’s sources suggest.

Some family members say they have been denied the opportunity to give their loved ones a traditional burial due to authorities’ concerns that the ceremony could attract unwanted attention.

At least 1,360 Chechen residents have “volunteered” to fight in Ukraine since the start of the war, according to figures cited by the speaker of Chechnya’s regional parliament, Magomed Daudov.

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