

URGENT ACTION

RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK OF FURTHER ATTACKS

Members of the Joint Mobile Group (JMG) have been repeatedly threatened by the Chechen authorities and targeted with increasing violence. They continue their human rights work in the North Caucasus, Russia, but impunity for the perpetrators exposes them to further attacks and puts their lives in imminent danger.

On 9 March, two **Joint Mobile Group (JMG) members, six journalists from Russian, Norwegian and Swedish media, and their driver** were brutally assaulted while travelling from North Ossetia to Chechnya. At around 19:00, their minibus was blocked by four cars near a security checkpoint on the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya. Around 20 masked men got out of the cars, armed with baseball bats and batons, dragged everyone out of the minibus and severely beat them before setting the vehicle on fire. The attackers shouted abuse and threats, calling the human rights defenders and journalists “defenders of terrorists”. Two hours later, the JMG’s office in Ingushetia was ransacked. CCTV showed two masked men attempting to smash the door and finally breaking in through the window. They stole laptops, cameras and other equipment, and vandalised the office.

On 16 March, the JMG’s leader **Igor Kalyapin** arrived in the Chechen capital Grozny to give a press-conference about these and earlier attacks on JMG colleagues and the journalists. Forty minutes after checking into his hotel he was told by the hotel’s director to leave. The director said this was because Igor Kalyapin “does not love” the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. Once outside the hotel, Igor Kalyapin was confronted by a violent mob. He was punched, pelted with eggs and cakes, and had flour and bright green liquid poured all over him.

These are the latest in a long series of increasingly violent attacks against Igor Kalyapin and members of the JMG, as well as of veiled and express threats originating from senior Chechen officials and unknown individuals. In the past, similar threats were followed with violence. Journalist Anna Politkovskaya and Chechen human rights defender Natalia Estemirova were among those who received such threats and were later killed. The Russian authorities have consistently failed to effectively investigate these threats and the attacks, and those who are behind them have enjoyed impunity. The JMG was created specifically to carry on frontline human rights work in Chechnya after Natalia Estemirova’s killing, and its members are determined to continue. Their lives may be at risk.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Expressing deep concern about the recurring attacks against human rights defenders and journalists in the North Caucasus and the authorities’ consistent failure to investigate these effectively thereby providing impunity for the perpetrators;
- Urging that the immediate perpetrators and the masterminds of the attacks of 9 March and 16 March against members of the JMG and journalists, and of the previous attacks against human rights defenders in the North Caucasus, are promptly identified and brought to justice in fair trial proceedings;
- Urging the authorities to respond to a string of threats against several prominent human rights defenders, media workers and political activists, which originated from the political leadership of Chechnya.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 MAY 2016 TO:

Chairman of the Investigation Committee
Aleksandr Ivanovich Bastrykin
Investigation Committee of the Russian Federation
Tekhnicheskii pereulok, dom 2
105005 Moscow, Russian Federation
Fax: +7499 265 90 77/ +7499 265 97 75
Salutation: Dear Chairman of the Investigation Committee

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation
Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General’s Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7495 987 58 41/ +7495 692 17 25
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. EXCELLENCY MR ALEXANDER V. YAKOVENKO, Embassy of the Russian Federation, 13 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QX tel: 020 7229 3620 email: info@rusemb.org.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Joint Mobile Group (JMG) is a joint initiative of several human rights NGOs. It was set up in 2009, shortly after the abduction and murder of courageous Chechen human rights defender Natalia Estemirova, to ensure continuous presence of frontline human rights workers in Chechnya in the context of persisting personal risks for those who confronted the Chechen authorities about grave human rights violations in the region. The JMG brings together, on a rotating basis, human rights lawyers from different regions across Russia, usually three at a time, to spend several weeks in Chechnya each. They take up cases of enforced disappearances, unlawful detention, torture and other human rights violations, providing legal representation for the victims at all stages of criminal investigation and in court, and monitor the progress of cases through the Russian criminal justice system.

The group has been repeatedly targeted, with violence and threats. Its offices in Grozny were destroyed twice, in December 2014 and in June 2015 (see UA 315/14 and UA 125/15). The current office in Grozny was broken into in March 2016. The media controlled by the Chechen administration have repeatedly published slanderous articles, often containing thinly veiled threats, against the group and against Igor Kalyapin personally. There have also been similar threats issued against journalists writing about human rights abuses in Chechnya, including, most recently, Elena Milashina from Novaya Gazeta.

The authorities formally opened criminal investigations into the attacks, but consistently failed to take any effective action to identify and prosecute those who took part and those who masterminded them. Some of the attacks happened in broad daylight, and there are photo and video materials and other evidence which should enable the authorities to make headway with such investigations. The more or less express threats that have been repeatedly made against members of the JMG and other activists by senior Chechen officials have also gone unheeded by the federal Russian authorities, in spite of the fact that in the past some of the killings of human rights champions were preceded by similar threats.

Names: Igor Kalyapin and nine victims of 9 March attack: Ivan Zhiltsov (JMG member), Ekaterina Vanslova (JMG member), Oistan Vindstad (journalist), Lena Maria Persson Löfgren (journalist), Aleksandrina Elagina (journalist), Anton Prusakov (journalist), Mikhail Solunin (journalist), Yegor Skovoroda (journalist), Bashir Pliev (driver).

Gender m/f: 7 men and 3 women

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