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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **On Continued Reports of Arrests, Unlawful Detention, Torture, and Killing of Gay Men by the Chechen Government**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 1, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On April 6 and April 27, the United States, as well as 39 other participating States, raised in the Permanent Council their concern about reports of arrests, unlawful detention, torture, and killings of people in Chechnya based on their sexual orientation, as well as those subjected to abuse by association. Since that time, reports detailing these violations and abuses of human rights have continued to emerge, including those documented in a May 26 Human Rights Watch report entitled “They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me: Anti-Gay Purge by Local Authorities in Russia’s Chechen Republic.”

The Human Rights Watch report, which appears to us to be well documented and to rely on independent sources in Chechnya, gives a timeline of events, provides multiple victims’ accounts of the violence perpetrated against them, and offers recommendations to Russian authorities, foreign governments, and international bodies. The report argues that, while violence against LGBTI individuals in the region is not new, the scale of the most recent violence and the direct involvement of Chechen authorities are unprecedented. It stresses that Chechnya’s law enforcement and security officials were involved in an “anti-gay purge,” in which they rounded up dozens of men on suspicion of being gay, held them in unofficial

detention facilities for days, and humiliated, starved, and tortured them. In addition to these abuses, the report asserts that Chechen officials encouraged their relatives to carry out honor killings. Information in the report shows that, despite denials by Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov, top-level local authorities in Chechnya sanctioned these actions.

These and other disturbing reports directly contradict the Chechen response by Chechen authorities to date, which has been one of denial and derision. We note a recent public statement by the Human Rights Ombudsman of Chechnya Nurdi Nukhazhiyev [*noor-DEE noo-ha-JEE-yev*] in which he said he is not aware that homosexuality exists as a “phenomenon” in Chechnya, and suggested that the controversy over the persecution of gay men is the result of a conspiracy to undermine Chechen society. In response to the Human Rights Watch Report, Speaker of the Chechen Parliament Magomed Daudov [*mah-GO-med dah-OO-dov*] said via social media “These corrupt devotees of ‘human rights’ have tried to accuse me of violence against those who have never existed in Chechnya... As a Russian citizen, I am prepared for any investigative inquiry, but as a Chechen man, I despise you!”

We and multiple other governments, including those seated here today, have urged the Russian government publicly to investigate. We are concerned by statements by Human Rights Ombudswoman of the Russian Federation Tatyana Moskalkova, who recently told journalists that she has not received any appeals for help from victims of anti-gay persecution in Chechnya. She did indicate that her staff would go to Chechnya to investigate the situation there after the Investigations Committee completes its inquiry; we hope this will be the case.

We repeat our steadfast support for efforts by Russian civil society groups to assist the victims of this violence. We condemn ongoing threats against the investigative newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, which broke this story. We call on the Russian government to make clear at the highest levels, and in the strongest terms, that such threats against the press are unacceptable.

We note the continuing work of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation and

look forward to hearing the results of the Committee's efforts in the Permanent Council. The United States reiterates its calls on the Russian government to thoroughly and impartially investigate these reports and hold all those responsible accountable. We also call on Russian officials to reject the hateful statements by some Chechen authorities justifying violence and killings, to make clear that the Russian government does not condone such actions, and to protect victims of this violence, as well as the civil society activists who seek to protect them. We further remind Russia of its international obligations and OSCE commitments to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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