

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST AT RISK AFTER RECEIVING DEATH THREAT

On 13 April, Chechnya's Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted a video on Instagram in which he issued a death threat aimed at Russian journalist Elena Milashina. The threat followed the publication of her article about the spread of COVID-19 in Chechnya. She is in grave danger and Russian authorities must take urgent steps to ensure her safety.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

**President of the Russian Federation
Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin**

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Dear President Putin,

I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the death threat posted on Instagram by the Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov on 13 April. The threat is aimed at Novaya Gazeta journalist **Elena Milashina** and came as a reaction to her article, published in Novaya Gazeta on 12 April, regarding the authorities' response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Chechnya. Ramzan Kadyrov accused Novaya Gazeta and its journalists of being "puppets of the West" and directly appealed to the Presidential administration and the Federal Security Service (FSB) "to stop those non-humans who are writing and provoking our people." He further alluded that unless they do it, someone in Chechnya would have to commit a crime to silence the journalist.

We are further concerned that the Presidential Press Secretary dismissed those very real and serious threats as "nothing out of the ordinary" and a mere "emotional" reaction "which is understandable in such a (COVID-19 pandemic) situation." Moreover, the Prosecutor General's office ordered that Elena Milashina's article must be removed from the Novaya Gazeta website.

This is not the first time that threats and attacks against human rights defenders and journalists in Russia are being neglected and even condoned by the authorities. This is a violation of Russia's international human rights obligations to protect human rights defenders and journalists and to promote freedom of expression which leads to further impunity for these crimes.

I am calling on you as the Head of the State and guarantor of the Constitution and human rights enshrined therein:

- **To publicly condemn the threats against Elena Milashina, take meaningful steps to ensure that this does not happen again and that Elena Milashina is safe;**
- **To uphold the right of journalists to investigate and report on the COVID-19 pandemic and the authorities' response in Chechnya and or other Russian regions and to protect the right to freedom of expression and information.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 12 April, Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta published Elena Milashina's article regarding the COVID-19 situation in Chechnya and the authorities' response to it. The article, entitled "Death of corona virus is a lesser evil - When in Chechnya those who are infected are being equalled to terrorists, people have started to conceal their disease and die at home," brought about an unprecedented response from the Head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov. He commented extensively on the article on his Telegram account and more alarmingly issued a video on Instagram in which he accused Novaya Gazeta and its journalists of being "puppets of the West" and directly appealed to the Russian government and the Federal Security Service (FSB) "to stop those non-humans who are writing and provoking our people." He stated: "We've had enough! If you want us to commit a crime and become criminals, then tell us so! One of us will take the burden of this responsibility on himself and suffer the punishment (for it) prescribed by law. He will spend some time in jail but will (eventually) be free. Do not try to turn us into criminals, murderers...".

This is not the first time Elena Milashina is being threatened for her work in Chechnya (see an Urgent Action we issued already in 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/1844/2015/en/>). On 6 February 2020, she and lawyer Marina Dubrovina were attacked and beaten up by a mob in a hotel in Grozny, Chechnya's capital (see here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/russia-prominent-investigative-journalist-and-lawyer-attacked-during-visit-to-chechnya/>). The investigation into this attack is now stalled, CCTV recordings from the crime scene have reportedly been "lost" and no perpetrators have been brought to justice. Ramzan Kadyrov also referred to this attack in his recent video, dismissing it as a mere act of "street hooliganism... not a crime" and alleging that "there was not a single witness, not a shred of evidence."

On April 15, the Prosecutor General's office ordered that the Novaya Gazeta article by Elena Milashina about Chechnya and the authorities' response to COVID-19 must be removed and it has been taken off the website. The Prosecutor General has not yet clarified its claims that the article contains "false information".

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 May 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Elena Milashina (she/her)

And copies to:

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