

The case of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva

On 16 May 2003 at approximately 3am, Aminat Dugaeva, 15, and her relative, Kurbika Zinabdieva, 34, were taken from the latter's home in Ulus-Kert in the mountainous region of Shatoi, Chechnya, by armed, masked men in dark blue uniforms who had entered the village in military vehicles.

The previous day, Russian federal forces had been checking passports in the entire village and had checked the documents of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva. The uniformed men who came at night reportedly entered one house only. Here they tied up Rumani Gekhaeva, the mother of Kurbika Zinabdieva, and left her in the courtyard where she remained, unable to see what happened in her house. Rumani Gekhaeva told Amnesty International that she was not found until later in the morning, and it was only then that she realized that her daughter and Aminat Dugaeva had "disappeared". None of their clothes was missing, but the men had taken documents regarding Kurbika Zinabdieva's health. She has a brain tumour and suffers from epilepsy, and is in need of constant medication.

While the relatives of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva started searching for them, a spokesperson for the Russian federal forces in the North Caucasus reportedly announced on local TV that two women from Ulus-Kert had been detained under suspicion of terrorism. In a police publication it was later mentioned that two women from Ulus-Kert had been accused of being involved in the hostage-taking in a theatre in Moscow in October 2002. When the mothers of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva turned to regional and local procuracies in an attempt to establish the whereabouts of their daughters, they were not given any information, and the procurator of Shatoi district even denied that the two had been detained, despite the public announcement made by other Russian officials earlier to the contrary.

Aminat Dugaeva and her family had been living in the Naurskii District of Northern Chechnya during the second conflict. She was visiting her relatives in Ulus-Kert for three days and was supposed to return to her family on the day she "disappeared". Her mother, Zlikhat Dugaeva, a widow whose three other children live abroad, and Rumani Gekhaeva now devote most of their time to the search for their daughters. They have both filed cases with the European Court of Human Rights as they felt that the authorities' response following the "disappearance" of their daughters has been inadequate and their concern for the well-being of their daughters has been met with inaction and even hostility.

Please write letters to the authorities:

- Expressing concern about the fate and well-being of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva and urging the authorities to release any information they may have about their whereabouts.
- Urging to thoroughly and effectively investigate the circumstances of the "disappearance" of the woman and the child and to bring to justice in a court of law, those found responsible.
- Urging the immediate release of Aminat Dugaeva and Kurbika Zinabdieva if they are being held by law enforcement officials or for them to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence and be given access to a lawyer of their choice and to their families.