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Russian Federation: Human rights activist and journalists beaten in Ingushetia

Amnesty International is shocked and appalled by the latest attack against a human rights defender and members of the media in the southern Russian Republic of Ingushetia.

According to the Human Rights Centre Memorial, Oleg Orlov, head of the Human Rights Centre Memorial, and three journalists from the Russian TV station *REN TV*, Artem Vysotskii, Karen Sakhinov and Stanislav Goriachikh, were woken up and taken from a hotel in Nazran, Ingushetia, during the night of 23 to 24 November by armed masked men in camouflage. The armed men took all their possessions from the hotel, including computers, money, notebooks, their clothes and mobile phones, and put plastic bags over their heads threatening to shoot them. The four men were then driven to an unknown place, where they were beaten and abandoned after two hours. As they had not been given time at the hotel to dress or take their shoes, they had to walk barefoot to the nearest police station in the village of Nesterovskaia, where they sought assistance.

Russian news agency *Interfax* quoted sources within the police stating that the abduction was carried out by "the military".

In the morning of 24 November, the four men told the police of Nazran about their abduction and ill-treatment. At the police station they were examined by a medical doctor who recommended that Artem Vysotskii should be urgently hospitalized. However, the police did not let him go and only allowed the three journalists to leave the police station at around 1pm. Oleg Orlov was allowed to leave the police station earlier, at around 11.30am.

Human rights defenders in Nazran believe this was an attempt to prevent the media from monitoring and reporting about a demonstration, which was planned to take place in Nazran that day. A staff member from Memorial in Nazran told Amnesty International that a police officer came to the Memorial office later that day. He apologized for the ill-treatment of Oleg Orlov and said "the armed men did not know who he (Oleg Orlov) was". Amnesty International is not aware of any similar apology being made in respect of the three journalists.

"The Russian government must take immediate steps to investigate the abduction and ill-treatment of human rights defender Oleg Orlov and the three journalists and to bring those suspected of violations to justice," Amnesty International said.

At the same time Amnesty International learned about the reported ill-treatment of those who had gathered in Nazran to demonstrate against the local authorities and repressive actions by law enforcement officials, including enforced disappearances, unlawful killings, torture and ill-treatment.

According to participants in the demonstration, special forces (OMON) shot above the heads of the demonstrators and beat several of them with batons; reportedly some demonstrators threw stones and eggs at the police. One participant told Amnesty International that only 70 or 80 demonstrators were present and the police vastly outnumbered them. The police detained several young men and took them to a police station.

"The Russian and Ingush authorities must also investigate promptly impartially, independently and thoroughly whether excessive force was used against demonstrators," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International also calls on the Council of Europe and the United Nations human rights mechanisms to take up this incident with the Russian authorities and to closely follow any investigations opened.

"The Russian and Ingush authorities must put an immediate end to human rights violations, and investigate all allegations effectively."

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