

## The Current Situation

On April 1, 2017, independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* reported that Chechen authorities detained more than one hundred gay men over the prior week “in connection with their nontraditional sexual orientation, or suspicion of such.” The newspaper reported that three of the men have been killed, while indicating that the death toll may be even higher. Survivors reported enduring beatings and torture as well as being forced to disclose the names of other members of the LGBT community in the region. The author cited multiple sources within the Chechen government and Russian authorities as well as local LGBT groups and activists.

Per *Novaya Gazeta*, the crackdown follows a Russian LGBT group’s filing official requests to permit LGBT pride parades in various cities throughout Russia. While the group did not plan a parade in Chechnya, the announcement was widely publicized in the media, sparking outrage and homophobic protests. The article’s author stated that sources within the Russian secret service explicitly linked the detentions to these events, calling them “a preventative sweep.” This round of detentions followed an earlier sweep prompted by the February detention of a man who had the names of many gay men—or presumed gay men—in his phone.

The Russian LGBT Network released a statement expressing alarm over the reported detentions, abuse, and murders. The organization is providing support to the victims and established an emergency hotline for those in need of assistance and evacuation from the region.

## The Context

LGBT people in Russia face a climate of widespread societal homophobia and transphobia. In 2013, Russia passed a federal law banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors.” The law breeds a permissive climate for violence and discrimination against members of Russia’s LGBT community. The Chechnya region is known for its poor record on human rights, with security forces acting with impunity against marginalized populations, including the LGBT community.

## Government Response

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov called the reports of detention and abuse “absolute lies and disinformation.” A spokesperson for the Chechen authorities responded to the media coverage and outrage over the detentions and killings by denying the existence of LGBT people in the region. He then alluded to so-called “honor killings” of LGBT people saying that “if such people existed in Chechnya, law enforcement would not have to worry about them, as their own relatives would have sent them to where they could never return.”

A spokesperson for President Vladimir Putin questioned the veracity of the reports, saying they are “a question for law enforcement” and that they are “not on the Kremlin's agenda.”

## International Outrage

The U.S. Department of State condemned the attacks and called on the Russian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation. The Department of State also expressed concern about “the widespread discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons in Russia or any society” and called “on the Russian government to protect all people from discrimination and violence.”

The president of the European Parliament strongly condemned the homophobic attacks while the Secretary General of the Council of Europe urged Russia’s High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate the attacks. Numerous international human rights organizations have expressed outrage and called for an investigation. The spokesperson for the European Union also called for “prompt, effective and thorough investigations into the reports of abductions and killings of gay men in Chechnya.”

## **U.S. Government Action**

Secretary Rex Tillerson will be in Russia this week. In his engagement with President Putin and other Russian leaders, he must elevate the immediate concerns facing members of the LGBT community in Chechnya and call for a thorough investigation into the brutal attacks against individuals based on their sexual orientation.