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**Russia: Human rights defenders Sergey Babinets, Oleg Khabibrakhmanov and woman human rights attorney Natalia Dobronravova attacked, mother of human rights defender Abubakar Yangulbaev abducted**

On 20 January 2022, Chechen law enforcement officers physically attacked human rights defenders and lawyers **Sergey Babinets** and **Oleg Khabibrakhmanov** and woman human rights attorney **Natalia Dobronravova**, while they were providing legal assistance for their clients in Nizhnii Novgorod. During the incident, Chechen officials abducted the human rights defenders client, Zarema Musaeva, who is the mother of human rights defender **Abubakar Yangulbayev**. Front Line Defenders believes that these attacks and the abduction is related to the human rights defenders human rights work.

Sergey Babinets and Oleg Khabibrakhmanov are human rights lawyers working with the Russian-based NGO “Committee Against Torture” (CAT). Abubakar Yangulbayev is a human rights defender and lawyer, who, until recently, worked with CAT. Natalia Dobronravova is a woman human rights defender and attorney, who collaborates with CAT on a regular basis. CAT’s lawyers investigate cases of torture in Russia and some other countries, including Belarus. CAT’s work, especially in the Russia’s republic of Chechnya, has been recognized by multiple awards, including Front Line Defenders Award in April 2011 and the Martin Ennals Award in 2013. Human rights defenders from CAT have been subjected to [defamation campaigns](#), [physical attacks](#), [detentions](#), and [judicial persecution](#) because of their peaceful human rights work.

On 20 January 2022, the human rights lawyers arrived at a safe house in Nizhnii Novgorod, having been alerted by their clients about Chechen officials trying to break into the apartment. The human rights defenders, accompanied by a woman human rights attorney Natalia Dobronravova, arrived on site and entered the safe house to offer legal support and protection for the clients. When Natalia Dobronravova exited the apartment premises to talk to the Chechen law enforcement officers about why they were trying to enter the premises outside of their regional jurisdiction, the Chechen law enforcement officers used force to enter the safe house. They hit Natalia Dobronravova in the face, beat up and pushed Sergey Babinets and Oleg Khabibrakhmanov into a spare room and locked them there to prevent them from protecting their clients.

Chechen officials proceeded to abduct Zarema Musaeva, who is the mother of a human rights defender, Abubakar Yangulbayev, a human rights lawyer, who formerly worked with the Committee Against Torture. In December 2021, representatives of the local Center for Countering Extremism [detained and questioned](#) Abubakar Yangulbayev in Pyatigorsk. The authorities forced the human rights defender to unlock his digital devices, threatening to send him to Chechnya. The subsequent leaking of Abubakar Yangulbayev’s personal emails and messages sparked a defamation campaign against him and his family in the Chechen right-wing media outlets.

Front Line Defenders condemns the law enforcement’s violent attack on human rights defenders Sergey Babinets, Oleg Khabibrakhmanov and Natalia Dobronravova, while they were carrying out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned with

the abduction of Zarema Musaeva, and believes her abduction is a retaliation for her son, Abubakar Yangulbayev's human rights work.

**Front Line defenders urge the Russian authorities to:**

1. Carry out an independent, impartial and transparent investigation into the attack on Natalia Dobronravova and Sergey Babinets and Oleg Khabibrakhmanov;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the abduction of Zarema Musaeva, mother of human rights defender Abubakar Yangulbayev. with a view to ensuring her protection, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russian Federation can carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with the Russian Federation's international human rights obligations and commitments.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 11: *"Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession (...)"* and to Article 12 (2): *"The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."*

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director