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## Russia: Lawyer Marina Dubrovina and journalist Elena Milashina violently attacked

On 6 February 2020, a group of unknown individuals violently attacked lawyer **Marina Dubrovina** and journalist **Elena Milashina** in the lobby of the Continent hotel in Grozny, Chechnya. The human rights defenders were in Grozny for the court hearing of Islam Nukhanov.

Marina Dubrovina is a lawyer and a human rights defender, who has worked on many politically motivated cases in the North Caucasus, including the cases of the head of the Human Rights Centre “Memorial” in Grozny, Oyub Titiev, and the Ukrainian prisoners in Russia Stanislav Klykh and Pavel Grib. Elena Milashina is a human rights defender and an investigative journalist working for “Novaya Gazeta”, an independent Russian newspaper. Through her investigations and reports she has drawn international attention to gross human rights violations in Chechnya and other North Caucasus republics. She covers cases of forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, torture and harassment of relatives of alleged insurgents, continuing the investigations started by her colleagues Anna Politovskaya and Natalya Estimirova.

Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina were in Grozny for the hearing of Islam Nukhanov, who had been illegally detained and tortured in the basement of the Department of the Ministry of Interior in Grozny after uploading a video on YouTube showing the luxurious houses of the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, and his allies. In the late evening of 6 February 2020, a group of more than 15 unknown individuals, men and women, surrounded Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina in the lobby of the Continent hotel in Grozny. The group attacked Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina, violently hit and kicked them, threw Marina Dubrovina on the ground, hit her head against the marble floor and filmed it with a mobile phone. During a medical examination, Elena Milashina was diagnosed with soft tissue injuries on the head, as well as bruises and scratches on the shoulders and neck. Marina Dubrovina was denied medical examination by a neurosurgeon in Grozny, who said that she looked fine. When Marina returned to her hometown from Chechnya she was diagnosed with concussion of the brain. Both human rights defenders reported the attack to law enforcement bodies in Chechnya.

Marina Dubrovina believes the attack is linked to her professional activity. The human rights defender currently works on four criminal cases in Chechnya. Her defendants are people who had been abducted, illegally detained and tortured. The human rights defender has been repeatedly threatened for representing defendants in Chechnya. When representing the Ukrainian political prisoner Stanislav Klykh, she was subjected to a defamation campaign aimed at discrediting the lawyers and journalists working on the case. The human rights defender and her colleagues were repeatedly accused on Chechen State Television and Radio Company “Grozny” of collaborating with the enemies of the Republic and criticizing the judicial system of Chechnya. In May 2016, Marina Dubrovina and another human rights lawyer Dokka Itsaev risked losing their lawyer’s licenses after the Supreme Court of Chechnya found them guilty of “discrediting the honor and dignity of a lawyer”.

Elena Milashina and “Novaya Gazeta” are constantly under pressure for covering cases in Chechnya. Following the publication of Milashina’s articles on the mass detentions of members of the LGBT+ community in Chechnya in 2017, she and her colleagues started receiving threats. In late January 2020, Ramzan Kadyrov, while commenting on reports that 27 people might have been killed during special operations in 2016–2017, called the journalists who wrote about the case “shaitans” (evil spirits). “Novaya Gazeta” is now investigating the story of 27 men reportedly

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executed in Chechnya, and the recent attack on Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina might be connected to the publication of the results of this journalistic investigation.

Front Line Defenders condemns the brutal attack on Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina. It believes the attack is directly linked to their peaceful and legitimate human rights work providing legal representation and covering human rights violations in Chechnya. Front Line Defenders considers the systematic attacks against human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists in Chechnya unacceptable and notes that they often follow harsh criticism of human rights defenders by the officials in Chechnya.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Chechnya to:**

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack on Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Marina Dubrovina and Elena Milashina.
3. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
4. Stop the persecution of human rights defenders in Russian Federation and guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and organisations are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.