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Russia: Human rights defenders Aleksandr Nemov and Elena Milashina attacked and severely beaten in Chechnya

On 4 July 2023, a group of unknown individuals attacked and severely beat human rights defenders **Aleksandr Nemov** and **Elena Milashina**, when they were in a taxi travelling from Grozny City Airport. Both human rights defenders were headed to Grozny, Chechen Republic, for the verdict announcement in the Akhmat District Court on the case of political prisoner Zarema Musayeva on 4 July 2023. They were both admitted to the Grozny City Hospital #9, but later transferred to a medical facility in Beslan, North Ossetia

[Aleksandr Nemov](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer. As a defence attorney, he collaborated with many human rights groups and organisations in Russia, focusing on cases of torture. He is one of the leading human rights lawyers in the country, systematically working on cases in Russia's North Caucasus and the Chechen Republic, including high-profile cases of political prisoners in Chechnya. [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 enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, torture, and harassment of relatives of alleged insurgents.

On 4 July 2023, at approximately 5 am, the human rights defenders Aleksandr Nemov and Elena Milashina arrived in Grozny, Chechen Republic, to attend the verdict announcement in the trial of political prisoner Zarema Musayeva. The human rights defenders were travelling from the airport in a taxi when three black cars blocked the road. Several armed men rushed from the three cars and dragged Aleksandr Nemov and Elena Milashina from their taxi onto the road, and severely beat them, hitting and kicking them multiple times on their torsos and heads, also using PVC pipes. The unidentified men, whose faces were covered by black balaclavas, threatened the human rights defenders by pointing guns at their heads and promising to kill them. They also broke all the equipment that the human rights defenders had with them; Aleksander Nemov used the taxi driver's phone to report the attack to his colleague.

Elena Milashina reported that the perpetrators broke her fingers on both hands, seemingly because she refused to unlock her phone, poured brilliant green solution on her face, and shaved her head. They also attacked Aleksander Nemov with a knife, resulting in a deep knife wound on his right calf. The taxi driver helped the human rights defenders to get to the emergency room from where they were both transferred to the Grozny City Hospital #9. Both human rights defenders have severe head traumas. Aleksandr Nemov has trouble walking and talking, and is currently in a wheelchair, yet is conscious; while Elena Milashina systemically loses consciousness, and can't sit up straight. Both human rights defenders refused to have their statement taken by the Chechen

law enforcement officials, stating their historic lack of efficiency. In the Grozny City Hospital #9, the human rights defenders were visited by the Human Rights Ombudsperson of the Republic of Chechnya, who personally accompanied them as they were transferred to a medical facility in Beslan, North Ossetia.

Human rights defender [Sergey Babinets](#) arrived in Grozny on 3 July 2023 for the court hearing on Zarema Musaeva, and visited Elena Milashina and Aleksandr Nemov in the hospital to document the attack. He reported that the unidentified perpetrators told the human rights defenders that this attack was motivated by their human rights work, stating that they explicitly told the human rights defenders about all the human rights work they've done in the Chechen Republic over the years. Despite the attacks, Aleksandr Nemov still plans to attend today's court hearing concerning political prisoner Zarema Musayeva.

This is not the first time human rights defenders have been targeted in relation to the case of political persecution of Zarema Musaeva, who is the mother of blogger and former Crew against Torture staff member Abubakar Yangulbayev. Chechen law enforcement officials [abducted](#) Zarema Musayeva on 20 January 2022, from Nizhnii Novgorod, Russia, in retaliation against her sons' work, who are vocal critics of the Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov. Chechen law enforcement officers, who arrived in Nizhnii Novgorod and kidnapped Zarema Musayeva, also physically attacked human rights defenders and lawyers Sergey Babinets, [Oleg Khabibrakhmanov](#) and [Natalia Dobronravova](#), while they were providing legal assistance to their clients in Nizhnii Novgorod.

Overall, Chechen authorities have systemically targeted human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers reporting on human rights abuses in the republic, starting with the [killing of woman human rights defender Natalia Estemirova](#) in 2009. In 2014 a group of unknown men orchestrated an [arson attack](#) against the office of the Joint Mobile Group in Grozny. In 2019, human rights defender Oyub Titiev was [sentenced](#) to 4 years in prison in retaliation against his human rights work. In 2020, a group of unknown individuals [violently attacked](#) lawyer Marina Dubrovina and journalist Elena Milashina in the lobby of the hotel in Grozny, Chechnya, when they attended a court hearing.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned about the attack on human rights defender and lawyer Aleksandr Nemov and woman human rights defender and journalist Elena Milashina in Grozny, Chechen Republic, as the organisation believes the attack was motivated by their legitimate and peaceful human rights work. The Russian authorities continuously fail to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, including human rights journalists and lawyers, who are being targeted for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work in the Chechen Republic. The authorities do not investigate crimes committed against human rights defenders that systemically occur in the North Caucasus region. 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 Defender urges the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the attack on Aleksandr Nemov and Elena Milashina, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice following international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of Aleksandr Nemov and Elena Milashina;

3. Stop the persecution of human rights defenders in the Russian Federation and guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and organizations can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.