

27 May 2019

Russia: Russian LGBT Network volunteer and staff member threatened by unknown individuals

On 24 May 2019, the **Russian LGBT Network** reported that a volunteer of the organisation had been threatened by unknown individuals who had broken into her apartment in Saint Petersburg on 17 May 2019. The perpetrators also made death threats against the Network's Emergency programme coordinator **David Isteev**.

The [Russian LGBT Network](#) is a human rights organisation working to protect the rights of the LGBTI+ community in Russia. In April 2017, the organisation drew public attention to a massive wave of detentions and torture of individuals identified by the authorities as members of the Chechen LGBTI+ community. The Network coordinated the protective relocation of more than 150 people as part of its Emergency programme. The Russian LGBT Network constantly receives information on the detentions of members of the LGBTI+ community via its Hotline. David Isteev is a human rights defender who coordinates the Russian LGBT Network's Emergency programme and assists the LGBTI+ community members at risk with emergency relocation from Chechnya. He has been regularly receiving threats in relation to his human rights work.

On 17 May 2019, seven unknown individuals raided the apartment of one of the volunteers of the Russian LGBT Network. The volunteer, who prefers to remain anonymous, has been assisting in the operation of the Network's Hotline. As reported by her, three of the perpetrators were Chechens, while others claimed to be affiliated with the Russian law enforcement authorities. They threatened to "take her to the police office and break all her bones". The perpetrators were looking for a person who participated in one of the Network's shelter programmes.

The assailants also took the volunteer's phone, found the contact details of the Network's Emergency programme coordinator David Isteev and told the volunteer to pass on the message that they would "find him and kill him". The Russian LGBT Network filed a report to the police in relation to the raid and the threats made against its members.

Members of the Russian LGBT Network have been facing constant threats and harassment in reprisal for their human rights work. In January 2019, a video containing insults and a death threat against the Network's Programs Director, Igor Kochetkov, [was published online](#).

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the death threats made against the Russian LGBT Network's volunteer and David Isteev, as it believes that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern about the deteriorating situation of human rights defenders working on LGBTI+ issues in Chechnya.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Russian Federation to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the break-in at the apartment of the volunteer of the Russian LGBT Network as well as the death threats against her and David Isteev, 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 and security of the Network's employees and volunteers;

3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Chechnya are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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 attention 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, threats, 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*" and to Article 18 (2): "*Individuals, groups, and non-governmental organisations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes.*"

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director