

Dagestani TV Journalist Fears for Life

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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The Memorial rights group appealed to authorities Tuesday about the plight of a Dagestani journalist who has received anonymous death threats and been harassed by law enforcement agencies after a report about police torture.

Zarema Gasanova has faced "systematic" threats since February after [reporting](#) in December about two local residents purportedly tortured to death after a dispute with traffic police in the town of Kizilyurt the previous month, Memorial said, citing an appeal that she filed with the organization over the weekend.

Gasanova, who had hosted two shows on state-owned Dagestan television, said she has been stalked and threatened by unidentified men, both in person and via text messages, and one message said her tongue would be cut out.

Gasanova said unidentified police officers came to her house in Makhachkala in February and September, behaving aggressively and not explaining the purpose of their visits.

Memorial head Oleg Orlov said by telephone that his organization sent an official request for information on who the officers were and why they had visited Gasanova to the Interior Ministry's branch in Dagestan on Tuesday.

Orlov said he also passed Gasanova's complaint to Mikhail Fedotov, head of the Kremlin human rights council.

A copy of Gasanova's complaint was posted on Memorial's [web site](#). Repeated calls to her cell phone went unanswered Tuesday.

Gasanova also has accused local law enforcement agencies of abuse of power in their treatment of terrorist suspects. She made those allegations in interviews with Chernovik, a Dagestani opposition newspaper that local authorities unsuccessfully tried to close on extremism charges in June 2009, but lost their suit in September 2010.

Gasanova posted an open letter to Dagestani President Magomedislam Magomedov on her web site in July, asking him to "punish" police officers guilty of power abuse. About 200 Dagestani supporters have signed the online letter.

Dagestan television's director, Aznaur Adzhiyev, suspended Gasanova's weekly shows in July over concerns for her life, saying the broadcasts might resume after "a while" but with a different host.

"I told her: I fear for you, let's stop it for now," Adzhiyev said by telephone Tuesday. "Journalists are killed here. I can't put her in danger."

No one was immediately available for comment at the press offices of the Dagestani prosecutor's office and the republic's branch of the Federal Security Service.

A Kremlin spokesman could not immediately comment on Gasanova's online letter Tuesday.

A spokeswoman for the local Interior Ministry, Fatima Ubaidatova, said the ministry had not received Memorial's complaint.

But she expressed doubt about the allegations, saying she would have been aware of any police visits to Gasanova had they taken place.

"Our officers do not allow themselves to act in such a way," Ubaidatova said by telephone.

A North Caucasus analyst with the Russian Academy of Sciences said regional authorities were unable to protect Gasanova from whomever was harassing her because she had created enemies by standing up for the rights of terrorist suspects.

Local law enforcement agencies are united in their hatred of terrorists, and taking the case public may be the only way to offer Gasanova a degree of protection, said the analyst, Enver Kisriyev.

Orlov said he was worried about Gasanova because "human rights activists and journalists are often attacked" in Dagestan.

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article said journalist Zarema Gasanova posted on her web site in July an open letter to President Dmitry Medvedev. It actually was to Dagestani President Magomedsalam Magomedov. Also, Gasanova has complained of receiving threats since February, not December as stated earlier in this article, in connection with her December report about police abuse.

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