

Van Damme Goes Back to Chechnya for Dinner

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Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that the British musician Sting attended City Day celebrations in October. It was Seal, not Sting, who attended.

Aging martial arts film star Jean-Claude Van Damme has reportedly returned to Chechnya for a dinner with the republic's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, despite taking a beating from rights activists for an earlier visit.

Van Damme, who attended the twin celebration of Kadyrov's birthday and Grozny's City Day on Oct. 5, said he went back to the republic because he wanted to "check out the sights," RIA-Novosti [reported](#).

The actor traveled to Chechnya on Tuesday, attending a play with Kadyrov called "Spiritual Values" that is based on local folklore. He then took part in a dinner centered around national cuisine.

Rights groups had criticized Western celebrities for schmoozing with Kadyrov, who is accused

of suppressing dissent and abusing women and minorities.

Van Damme had already come under fire over the October celebration, which was also attended by Hilary Swank, Seal, Vanessa-Mae and members of the German dance troupe MDR Fernsehballett, some of whom were reportedly paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to attend.

Pop star Shakira is the only celebrity known to have turned down an invite to the show, which was to celebrate the revamp of war-torn Grozny but instead raised eyebrows with its exorbitant cost. Kadyrov denied that taxpayers footed the bill, saying the money came from unidentified sponsors.

Swank later said she would hand over her earnings to charity, as did MDR Fernsehballett.

Van Damme, 51, a former professional kickboxer, is beloved by many Russians because his movies — like "Kickboxer" (1989), "Double Standard" (1991) and "Universal Soldier" (1992) — were among the first Hollywood flicks to get wide distribution after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

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