

Rights Group Slams J.Lo for Singing to 'Thugs' in Ex-U.S.S.R.

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Jennifer Lopez performs at London's "The Sound of Change" concert June 1. **Neil Hall**

WASHINGTON, July 15 — A U.S. human rights group has accused American pop star and actress Jennifer Lopez of cozying up to criminals and rights abusers by accepting more than \$10 million to perform for politicians and businessmen in the former Soviet republics.

Lopez, who performed last month for Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov during his lavish birthday celebrations at a Caspian Sea resort, "has repeatedly mingled with and entertained some of the world's worst thugs and their cronies," Thor Halvorsen, president of the New York-based Human Rights Foundation HRF, said in a statement.

The performance for Berdymukhamedov, whose government is described by Human Rights Watch as one of the world's most repressive regimes, was the latest in a series of lucrative gigs for Lopez in front of officials accused of rights abuses in the West and by political opponents at home, HRF said.

The rights group claims Lopez, known as J.Lo, was paid \$1 million by a Uzbek industrialist

to perform at his son's wedding with Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov in attendance.

Human rights groups and critics have long accused Kadyrov and his local forces of abductions, extrajudicial killings, torture and other grave human rights abuses, though the Kremlin has credited him with restoring peace in the war-ravaged province.

HRF further accused Lopez of playing a show for \$2.5 million from Azerbaijan's government, which is also accused in the West of political repression, and criticized her for performing last year in Belarus, which is led by President Alexander Lukashenko, widely described as "Europe's last dictator."

Following her performance for Berdymukhamedov, a publicist for Lopez told The Associated Press that the singer's staff had signed off on the event.

"Had there been knowledge of human rights issues any kind, Jennifer would not have attended," the publicist was quoted as saying.

Halvorsen of HRF said, however, that it "beggars belief" that Lopez and her team would be unable to conduct a Google search that would turn up voluminous accusations of abuses leveled against the officials she has performed for.

"This is not about ignorance, it's about greed," Halvorsen said.

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