

NGO Attacked in Chechnya Files Complaint About Police Inaction

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

The Committee Against Torture, a prominent human rights NGO whose office was attacked in the Russian republic of Chechnya on Wednesday, has filed a complaint over the police's handling of the incident, the Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

Masked men emerged from a crowd of protesters in the capital Grozny, broke down the door to the organization's office and vandalized the property, forcing employees to escape out a window on Wednesday.

The Committee Against Torture claimed Wednesday it had called both the municipal and regional police, as well as investigators while the incident was under way, but their calls went unanswered and no law enforcement units were dispatched to the scene in time to stop the attack.

“We are submitting complaints to law enforcement agencies and the Investigative Committee, including about the police's inaction [during the rampage],” Interfax quoted Igor Kalyapin, the head of the NGO, as saying Thursday. “Despite our numerous appeals to authorities about the attack, the police did not react until everything was over.”

The Interior Ministry said Thursday that 30 people had been arrested on suspicion of having ransacked the Grozny office of the Committee Against Torture NGO, the Interfax news agency reported. On Wednesday, investigators told the Memorial human rights organization that more than 40 people had been detained over the incident. Memorial wrote on its official Facebook page that it was unclear how the arrests could have been made because no witnesses at the scene had seen anyone being apprehended by police.

Kalyapin called on the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights to ensure that the investigation into the attack would not be conducted by Chechen law enforcement officials, whom he said he did not trust in the given circumstances, Interfax reported.

Kalyapin said the Committee Against Torture would continue its work in Chechnya despite Wednesday's attack, but had not yet decided whether it would keep an office in the republic.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov accused the NGO of having brought the attack upon itself, saying its employees had refused to come out of their office to interact with protesters, who he said had taken to the streets to express their anger at the organization's reluctance to investigate the death of Dzhambulat Dadayev, a wanted Chechen man who was shot dead in Chechnya this spring by law enforcement officers from the neighboring Stavropol region. The Chechen leader also suggested that Dadayev's relatives had taken part in the attack.

“Analysis of the incident gives us reason to conclude that the committee's staff deliberately provoked the incident with the objective of getting attention in the international media and obtaining new American grants,” Kadyrov's Instagram post read. “We are concerned that these people, who have nothing to do with human rights activities, systematically create a tense atmosphere and try to provoke riots in Grozny.”

Russia adopted legislation in 2012 requiring NGOs that receive foreign funding and engage in broadly defined political activity to register as “foreign agents” with the Justice Ministry. The Committee Against Torture was added to the ministry's registry of “foreign agents” in January. These organizations have faced increasing pressure from authorities, according to human rights watchers in the country.

The Committee Against Torture dismissed Kadyrov's theory that a genuine outburst of anger had sparked the attack on its office.

“We are convinced that the people who took part in the protest clearly did not understand why they were there,” the organization said Thursday in a statement published on its Facebook page. “The attack itself was not carried out by protesters, and was certainly not initiated by Dadayev's relatives.”

On Wednesday, a representative of the NGO said the attack had been planned, pointing out that the attackers had brought heavy-duty tools with them that they used to break down the office's door.

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