

Football Star Salah Poses for Controversial Photo-op With Chechnya's Kadyrov

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Reuters

Egyptian football star Mohamed Salah has drawn criticism from human rights activists for posing in photos with Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov on his first day on Russian soil ahead of the World Cup.

Liverpool forward Salah, 25, touched down on Sunday in the Chechen capital of Grozny, where the Egyptian squad is based. Chechnya has come under fire for its record on human rights abuses. Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on FIFA last month to lobby Russian for the release of Oyub Titiev, head of the Grozny-based Human Rights Center Memorial, on what it calls "[bogus](#)" marijuana possession charges.

Embed:

Ramzan Kadyrov gets his glamour shot with Mo Salah, arguably the most popular footballer in the Muslim world. For more on how Kadyrov has used the World Cup to bolster his Middle East outreach: <https://t.co/s1l4jSdMHY>. Photo via [@marcbennetts1](https://twitter.com/LtzoYcxao2) [pic.twitter.com/LtzoYcxao2](https://twitter.com/LtzoYcxao2)

— Andrew Roth (@Andrew__Roth) [10 июня 2018 г.](#)

“As expected, torturers and murderers are being praised on the world stage,” HRW European media director Andrew Stroehlein [tweeted](#) Monday, criticizing FIFA’s decision to authorize Chechnya as a World Cup training base.

Kadyrov is [seen](#) as President Vladimir Putin’s de-facto [envoy](#) to the Middle East and the greater Muslim world.

Facebook and Instagram [blocked](#) Kadyrov’s accounts last year after the United States blacklisted him for allegedly orchestrating human rights abuses in Russia’s Muslim-majority region. The U.S. designated him as a human rights abuser following a 2017 report alleging that gay men were detained and tortured in secret Chechen prisons.

Kadyrov denies the existence of homosexuals in the North Caucasus republic, a claim that the Kremlin [does](#) not [dispute](#).

In a social media post with footage showing him shaking hands with Salah and greeting fans at a stadium named after his father, a former Chechen president also accused of human rights abuses, Kadyrov said the World Cup will advance football’s popularity.

“We’ll use this opportunity in full. Russia’s enemies have poured a lot of bile trying to trip up Russia on its way to the tournament,” Kadyrov wrote Sunday. “But Russian President Vladimir Putin and his team have proven that there are no challenges that our great motherland Russia is powerless against.”

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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