



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Investigate All Attacks against the Joint Mobile Group and Ensure Safety for Human Rights Defenders in the Chechen Republic

Statement by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its deep concern and indignation about recent and earlier attacks on human rights defenders from the Joint Mobile Group (JMG) of the Committee against Torture (CAT) in the Chechen Republic.

On 3 June 2015, a group of masked men carrying hammers and crowbars attacked the office of the JMG in Grozny. Members of the mob were a small part of a larger demonstration of several dozen Chechen residents, who gathered in front of the JMG office to protest against the CAT work in Chechnya; many participants came there at the orders of their superiors at work and did not even understand where they came to and for what purpose. A group of mobsters vandalised the JMG vehicle and stormed into the JMG office by prying open metal doors and climbing onto its balcony. When the JMG employees, fearing for their own safety, escaped the office through the window, the mob destroyed the organisation's equipment and took away documents related to the ongoing legal cases the CAT is working on.

This is the second attack against the CAT in the last six months. In December 2014, the JMG's office in Grozny was destroyed in a suspected arson attack. The JMG personnel was arrested, detained, and searched without any explanations or search warrants. Computers, photo cameras, and mobile phones of the JMG members were confiscated.

The Russian authorities have not carried out effective investigation of the December attack. As for the latest attack on 3 June, there was no information on violence against the JMG office on the Chechen state TV channel. Moreover, Ramzan Kadyrov, Head of the Republic, has publicly stated that the JMG itself provoked this attack to gain publicity and attract additional support for its work from abroad. In the past, Ramzan Kadyrov has frequently accused the CAT and JMG for 'demonising the authorities' in order to wage 'information war' against Chechnya and Russia.

Open aggression against human rights defenders, be it committed by the authorities or private actors, combined with the state lack of effective investigation of the violent attacks against activists stifles work of human rights NGOs in the Chechen Republic and intimidates human rights defenders.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on the Russian federal authorities to conduct prompt and thorough investigation of both attacks against the JMG, hold accountable those responsible for the attacks, stop verbal and other forms of intimidation of human rights defenders working in the Chechen Republic, and provide normal working conditions for them.

