



## **Input on Killing of LGBTIQ+ persons in Russia**

For the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial,  
summary or arbitrary executions

June 2024

### **I. Background of Submitting Organisations.**

**Coming out** ([comingoutspb.com](http://comingoutspb.com)) is a regional nonprofit initiative group founded in 2008 in St. Petersburg, Russia. We have been protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and helping queer people in Russia live more peacefully. Our main goal is to establish equal legal and social rights for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We monitor discrimination to collect evidence of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Russia and work with the authorities on cases of discrimination and violence.

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**NC SOS** — North Caucasus SOS Crisis Group ([ncsos.io](http://ncsos.io)) is a Russian NGO founded in 2017, which works with LGBTQ+ individuals in the republics of the North Caucasus. NC SOS assists victims of SOGIE-informed torture and abuse in fleeing the region and provides them with legal and social support.

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### **II. Russian legal context**

Russia has several repressive laws that restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ people. First, there is the law banning gay propaganda, which was passed in 2013 and significantly strengthened in 2023. It now bans all gay propaganda offline and online for everyone, not just minors, and

imposes heavy administrative fines for violating the law. Second, the anti-transgender law was introduced in July 2023, which prohibited transgender people from accessing gender-affirming health services – including voluntary surgeries; the law also prohibited people from changing their name and legal gender. And finally, the Russian Supreme Court's decision in 2023 to recognize the "international LGBT movement" as extremist. These are not in themselves about protecting the right to life, but our data shows that attackers of LGBTQ+ people use repressive legislation to justify their violent actions.<sup>1</sup>

Russia has a serious problem with hate crimes, which are not effectively investigated and punished. Currently, there is no specific action plan in Russia aimed at combating hate crimes. A characteristic element of a hate crime is the motive: the perpetrator chooses the object of the crime precisely because of his or her membership or perceived membership in a certain social group. However, the motive of hate is not taken into account in the majority of cases. Failure to recognize the hate motive contributes to the sense of impunity that remains with the perpetrators and encourages them to commit new crimes.

### **III. Distrust of the Russian police**

LGBTQ+ people have little trust for Russian law enforcement, 'Coming Out' surveys<sup>2</sup> have been reporting a consistently low level of credibility two years in a row. Among those who have been victims of hate crimes in 2023, as little as 14% reported to the police. Last year, the proportion was 20%, which can speak to the fact that victims of hate crimes are reporting to the police even less frequently. Out of those who reported to the police, 44% were pressured by the police. More than a third (34%) of those who have reached out to the police stated that their case was denied, 29% noted that they are not aware of the status of their case since it had been filed.

Among those who have been victims of hate crimes but did not report to the police, the most common reason for doing so was doubt that reporting to the police will be effective (78%). Fear of police officers was another common (73%) reason among our respondents, which is rather valid, judging by their experience with law enforcement. Approximately 50% of those who refused to go to the police, explained that they decided to do so in fear of being outed

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ+ People in Russia: 2023 Full Report. Coming Out; Sphere, 2024. P. 35.

<https://comingoutspb.org/en/books/lgbt-people-in-russia-2023-full-report/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 50-51.

which could have happened along their filing a case; 23% mentioned fearing that their offender could have found out about them having reported to the police.

Police inaction on hate crimes, their aggression towards LGBTIQ+ people and low levels of trust in them contribute significantly to the failure to respect and protect the right to life of LGBTIQ+ people.

#### **IV. Case Analysis**

##### **1. Convictions for killing of LGBTIQ+ persons**

The Russian practice of investigations and convictions for confirmed murders of LGBTIQ+ people demonstrates a condoning attitude towards this type of crime and a refusal to take into account the hate motive.

*In January 2020, a transgender woman who was a sex worker and a migrant from Tajikistan was killed in St. Petersburg. A former client, Yanovsky, sawed her body into pieces and threw it into the Mga River. The criminal case was opened as an ordinary murder case without a hate motive. The Vasileostrovsky District Court of St. Petersburg sentenced Yanovsky to one year and ten months in a general regime colony.<sup>3</sup> The court found Yanovsky guilty of murder committed while exceeding the limits of necessary self-defense (Part 1 of Article 108 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). As a result, Yanovsky was released in the courtroom: the time spent in custody was deducted from his sentence.*

##### **2. Obstacles in verifying extrajudicial executions in the North Caucasus**

When it comes to extrajudicial executions of LGBTIQ+ persons in Russia's North Caucasus since 2020, the human rights organization NC SOS has documented at least 6 cases that the group understands as liminal. Such liminality arises from the widespread practice of honor killings, which makes it almost impossible to document them as such. While multiple critical factors are pointing to the fact that an extrajudicial execution has taken place, various state and non-state actors in the Chechen Republic, rooted in corruption schemes, nepotism, and state-enforced practices of collective responsibility, work together to hide the fact of extrajudicial execution.

Traditional burial practices in Islam, and, at times, their interpretation in the Chechen society — require immediate burial that commonly remains undocumented and lacks independent

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<sup>3</sup> A St. Petersburg man who killed and dismembered a transgender woman was found guilty of exceeding self-defense. He was released in the courtroom // Meduza. 2022. 17 February.  
<https://meduza.io/news/2022/02/17/peterburzhtsa-kotoryy-ubil-i-raschlenil-transgendernuyu-zhenschinu-priznali-vinovnym-v-prevyshenii-samooborony-ego-osvobodili-v-zale-suda>

witness and medical documentation identifying the cause of death. In most of the cases where NC SOS assumes the extrajudicial execution of its beneficiary, that legal framework requires the organization to continue viewing it as an enforced disappearance.

### Identified cases

Below, NC SOS identified the cases where a beneficiary is assumed to be a victim of an extrajudicial execution:

#### **Seda Suleymanova**

*On August 23, 2023, Chechen bisexual woman Seda Suleymanova, 1997, was abducted from her apartment in Saint Petersburg by a group of six individuals, two of whom presented themselves as police officers. She was forcibly transported to the Chechen Republic and handed over to her relatives.*

*In early February 2024, two independent sources from the Chechen Republic reported to the NC SOS that Suleymanova might have been murdered by her relatives.*

*Owing to pressure from the public and human rights advocates, on March 25, 2024, the Investigative Committee initiated a criminal investigation into Suleymanova's disappearance under Article 105 of the Russian Criminal Code (Murder).<sup>4</sup> However, there have been no advancements in the investigation as of now.*

#### **Shamil, Chechen barber**

*According to sources from NC SOS in the Chechen Republic, in 2021, a young gay Chechen man Shamil (surname unknown), who was employed as a barber, was detained in Chechnya. Reports indicate that Shamil had, presumably under coercion, previously collaborated with the Chechen police by acting as "bait" in decoy operations designed to identify other homosexual men within the republic. His current whereabouts remain unknown, and the sources consider that he may have been killed.*

#### **Chechen young man**

*Sources within NC SOS in the Chechen Republic reported the murder of a young gay Chechen man by his grandfather in 2021. During a routine roundup by Chechen police targeting young men, intimate photos of a homosexual nature were discovered on the phone of one of the detained. The detainee, who had no living parents and was under the guardianship of his grandfather, was taken to the police department in Grozny. The police extorted money from the grandfather, threatening to disseminate information about his grandson and "bring disgrace upon the family." The grandfather went to the police station*

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<sup>4</sup> Murder investigation opened into Chechen woman's disappearance after public outcry // Novaya Gazeta Europe. 2024. 8 April.

<https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/04/08/murder-investigation-opened-into-chechen-womans-disappearance-after-public-outcry-en-news>

*and fatally shot his grandson using a police major's handgun. Subsequently, the young man's body was removed from the station and buried in an undisclosed location within Chechnya.*

### **Chechen school principal**

*According to sources from NC SOS in the Chechen Republic, in 2021, the principal of School No. 11 in the Staropromyslovsky District of Grozny was caught committing sexual acts with male high school students. Subsequently, he was taken into custody by Chechen police officers. His current whereabouts remain unknown, and the sources consider that he may have been killed.*

### **3. Forced military conscription as a new form of extrajudicial execution**

A new form of extrajudicial execution, specific for gay men or men whom the authorities targeted for having sexual relations with other men, is forced military conscription within the framework of Russia's war in Ukraine. Chechen law enforcement authorities, when systemically targeting these population groups, forced the persons to "voluntarily enlist" and sent them off to the war. Several testimonies point to the fact that these Russian military groups from Chechnya executed them before combat.

#### Identified cases

Below, NC SOS identified the cases where Chechen men detained on the grounds of homosexuality were forcibly sent to war:

#### **Idris Arsamikov**

*On February 15, 2023, a Chechen gay man Idris Arsamikov, 1994, was detained at a Moscow airport while attempting to fly to the Netherlands. He had previously resided there and obtained refugee status after being subjected to torture in the Chechen Republic in 2017.*

*In 2022, Arsamikov returned to Chechnya from the Netherlands for his father's funeral, believing the threat to his safety had passed. However, he was detained and tortured again in Chechnya. To prevent his departure, Chechen authorities implicated him in a fraud case. Law enforcement agents then transported Arsamikov from the airport back to Chechnya, although no further action was taken on the case. According to reports from NC SOS sources, Arsamikov was forcibly sent to the front lines in Ukraine.*

#### **Chechen refugee**

*The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) reported on the transfer of two Chechen homosexual brothers from Denmark to Croatia under the Dublin Regulation on October 1, 2023. The transfer was managed after securing assurances from Croatian authorities that the brothers would have access to the asylum procedures as required by EU and international law. Initially placed in an asylum center in Zagreb, they were soon issued deportation orders to Russia without a chance to contest the decision or further pursue their asylum claims. One of the brothers managed to escape to Georgia, but was subsequently detained and deported to*

*Russia, where he was forced into a military training camp. The DRC has since lost contact with him, and the fate of his brother remains unknown.*

*Additionally, the applicants informed the DRC that they knew other Chechens who had been taken at Moscow airport and sent directly to military camps or to the front lines in Ukraine.*

## **V. Conclusion**

Thus, Russia fails to protect the right to life of LGBTQ+ people. Discriminatory legislation, encouragement of hatred against LGBTQ+ people by the state, low effectiveness of appeals to the police create a situation as if violence against LGBTQ+ people is not prohibited. Cases of murders of LGBTQ+ people show that the Russian authorities have a condoning attitude towards such crimes and, in the case of the North Caucasus, actively participate in them or cover up for the perpetrators.

## **VI. Recommendations**

- Effectively investigate all cases of violence against LGBTQ+ persons and activists and bring perpetrators to justice.
- Establish a specialized unit within the police to investigate hate crimes.
- When registering crimes, document the motive of hate at any stage of the inquiry, including at the start of the investigation.
- Ensure victims have access to legal proceedings and receive adequate reparation, as appropriate.
- Provide training to the police and law enforcement officials promoting respect for human rights and tolerance for diversity.
- Collect disaggregated statistical data on hate crimes against vulnerable groups, including LGBTQ+ people