



Oppression of LGBTQ+ Community in the Republic of Chechen

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Abstract

The Chechen Republic is a constituent republic of Russia, located in Eastern Europe within the Northern Caucasus, near the Caspian Sea. During the First Chechen War with Russia from 1994 to 1996, Chechnya was able to gain de facto independence from Russia and established itself as the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. However, in the Second Chechen War from 1999 to 2000, Russia was able to assert its hold back on Chechnya. Since then till 2017, systematic measures have been taken to rebuild and reconstruct the region.

Keywords: Human rights; Chechen Republic; Russia; LGBTQ+ community

Introduction

Violation of human rights is a serious concern in the Chechen Republic. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reported that nearly hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chechens and Russians had to flee their homes during the conflict period from 1994 to 1999. The human rights group criticized how the 2005 Chechnya parliamentary elections were conducted, terming it to be unfair and being influenced by the Russian military and government [1]. The Director of the Europe and Central Asian division of the Human Rights Watch, Holly Cartner, stated that being imprisoned in the Chechen Republic meant a high risk of being tortured without the torturer being held accountable for any actions.

In 2017, Novaya Gazeta, a Russian socio-political newspaper known for its investigative critical coverage of Russian social and political affairs, reported that the Chechen authorities had established concentration camps inside the region where gay men were held, interrogated, and subjected to immense physical violence and torture. In 2019, it was reported that the Chechen government has started to indulge in criminal activity of 'gay purge' in December 2018, wherein several individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community were detained.

The LGBTQ+ community has found its social standing in the larger community after centuries of overcoming stigma and challenges. Even though various governing authorities, both in the international sphere as well as in the domestic sphere, have given them recognition in society, social stigma and perceptions against the community continue to persist. More than political action, this calls for a social and psychological change that needs to be imbibed in political mechanisms. In other words, the LGBTQ+ community will continue to face social stigma if the governing bodies do not take up stringent measures to change the prevailing social perception. However, in many parts of the world, it can be observed that it is the governing bodies themselves who indulge in the oppression of the LGBTQ+ community and the abridgment of their human rights. For instance, the Republic of Chechen, since the end of the Second Chechen War in 2000, has been involved in the

oppression and subduction of the concerned individuals because of their sexual orientation [2]. This has led to an international outburst without the governing authorities taking any measure to change their views. This research tries to understand the historicity of the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in the Republic of Chechen and the international reaction to the criminal instances.

The rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals living in Chechnya, have always been a cause of concern for the different

human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Being a part of the Russian Federation, the LGBTQ+ laws automatically apply to the residents of Chechnya. This means that there is no formal protection of the LGBTQ+ community in the Republic of Chechen, and in fact, the governing authorities encourage the murder of individuals who are suspected of homosexuality.

Since the beginning of 2017, Chechnya has participated in the violent crackdown and torture over the LGBTQ+ community. This led to the purposeful kidnapping, detention, and torture of bisexual men and the gay [3]. Several hundreds of men became a victim of this attack and nearly 20 of such individuals were reported to be dead. The police in the Republic of Chechen are believed to have carried out different unlawful acts of detentions, the humiliation of the target population and physically assaulting those who were believed to be bisexual or gay. According to Human Rights Watch, such forms of abuse emerged against the backdrop of impunity for the massive anti-gay purge in 2017. In an interview with 4 individuals, the Human Rights Watch came to an astonishing conclusion. The individuals were detained for nearly 3 months, between December 201 to February 2019 inside the Grozny Internal Affairs Department. According to the victims, they were physically assaulted by the police, and on one occasion, 3 of the 4 individuals were also tortured with electric shocks while one was molested with a stick. This account was found to be in line with the report filed by the Russian LGBT Rights Network, a prominent Russian investigation agency. The 4 detainees further testified that the police forced them to reveal the names of other bisexual and gay people in the society. The police even revealed the sexual orientation of one of the detainees to his family members, with the primary objective to publicly shame him and his family. The extent of mental stress to which these individuals have been submitted can only be imagined.

The law enforcement of the Republic of Chechen also indulged in a psychological breakdown of the individuals suspected to be gay or bisexual men. They inflicted verbal as well as physical abuse on the victims. The victims were given limited access to water and were denied

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food on multiple occasions. They were even forced to undress in front of the other prisoners and were made to shave their beards as a sign of humiliation.

An international outburst followed this action wherein the United Nations Human Rights Council reported in 2017 that such acts of violence and persecution on an unprecedented scale within the region, constitute a grave violation of the obligations of the Russian Federation towards the international human rights law and regulations [4]. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concerns about the worsening situation. In 2019, the experts stated that the violence inflicted on the victims of the LGBTQ+ community has worsened over the years and has become crueler than it did in 2017. It is not only the homosexual men who are being targeted in the Republic of Chechen but now the governing authorities have started to oppress the women.

However, the Chechen Republic refuted all allegations made against its government. Despite a large-scale international reaction against its purge of the LGBTQ+ community, the Russian authorities failed to conduct any kind of investigation into the reports submitted to it. In fact, in May 2018, the Russian Minister of Justice, Aleksander Kononov, stated to the United Nations Human Rights Council that following the investigations executed by Russia, they concluded that they were no representatives of the LGBTQ+ community in the Republic of Chechen and nor there was evidence of a violation of human rights against such individuals. In this scenario, it is to be noted that the authorities not only failed to accept their crime but also tried to deny any identification to a particular section of people living in the Republic of Chechen.

The Moscow Mechanism was invoked in November 2018 by sixteen participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The objective of the Moscow Mechanism was to investigate the allegations of human rights violations in the Chechen Republic. In the report submitted to the Organization, it was concluded that human rights violations did indeed occur and individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community were verbally and physically assaulted and tortured [5]. The United Nations Human Rights Council received a report in which it was claimed that the international partners of Russia, including the United States of America, should pressure Russia at an international level to investigate the allegations of torture and hold the perpetrators responsible for their actions.

Conclusion

In 2021, the European Union held two Russian individuals to be responsible for engaging in human rights violations and abusing the LGBTQ+ community. The Union stated that LGBTQ+ individuals were often detained by the Russian authorities under the pretext of opposition to Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of the Chechen Republic. He has also been sanctioned by the United States of America for indulging in human rights violations. The European Union further blacklisted Abuzaid Dzhandarovich Vismuradov, the leader of the Special Rapid Response Unit Team known as "Terek", which played a significant role in the systematised persecution of LGBTQ individuals in 2017 and Aiub Vakhaevich Kataev, the Head of Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The European Union accused Kataev of being responsible for overseeing the abusive activities of the law enforcement towards the LGBTQ+ community in the Republic of Chechen.

This shows that since 2017, the Chechen Republic has undertaken systematic measures to oppress the LGTQ+ community in the region. The international community has expressed their concerns about the violence but without being able to take any constructive actionable measures against the concerning issue. A more systematic approach is needed on the part of the international federation to not only hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions, but to ensure that the victims are brought to justice. The European Union, the United States of America and the United Nations Human Rights Watch are setting exemplary expectations to this regard by imposing regular sanctions on the identified perpetrators and calling for respect towards human dignity and freedom.

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