

Chechen Refugee Leader Vanishes

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A champion of the rights of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia is kidnapped

A group of armed men, wearing masks and camouflage fatigues, burst into the IngAvto camp early one morning in late October, kidnapping Adam Arsanukayev who has not been seen since.

A month earlier, IWPR met Arsanukayev in Nazran, the main city of Ingushetia. He was touring offices in the city centre asking for help for the refugees in his care.

A tall man with a thick black moustache and lots of energy, Adam impressed with his keen intelligence and commitment to the 120 people of IngAvto, a makeshift camp in a former truck garage near Ingushetia's border with Chechnya.

Aged 43 and the most experienced and professional of the group of refugees who left Chechnya in 1999, Arsanukayev became IngAvto's camp superintendent. He could be found lobbying for the refugees' interests, liaising with humanitarian agencies, knocking on bureaucrats' doors.

In September, Arsanukayev invited us back to his camp, where we met his wife Rosa and their four children, housed in two small rooms. His concern that day was the problems of half-a-dozen of his residents, who had been left off lists of refugees, due to bureaucratic errors. (See CRS 149)

"A new census of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia has been held, and some of our people were found missing from the official lists," recalled IngAvto resident Birlant Demilkhanova. "Then we were told that those without official registration would be deported back to Chechnya. Adam went to the migration office and the police trying to get the missing people back on the lists."

Now their camp, which was always abuzz with activity, has gone quiet as many here fear for the future.

"People took all their grievances to him, and he always tried his best to help," recalled Rosa, who has been spending most of her time in Chechnya trying to find her kidnapped husband.

According to Adam's neighbours, his kidnappers arrived in a white Zhiguli VAZ-2106 and a Niva off-roader. Aindi Bataev, who is now deputising for Adam, looked out of his window and saw that the number-plates on both cars were plastered with mud. Nevertheless, he could make out the number 95, the digits that indicate Chechnya on the number-plate. Ingush police attempted to chase the kidnappers, but to no avail.

Rosa believes law enforcement officers loyal to Chechnya's pro-Moscow authorities were behind the October 29 abduction of her husband. "Adam's firm stance on Chechen refugee repatriation contradicted Chechnya's official policy," she said. "He was convinced it was too early for the refugees to go back, and always made his opinion known."

Meanwhile, Chechen human rights activist Minkail Ezheev of the Moscow Helsinki Group, has launched his own investigation into the abduction. So far, he says, both Chechen and Ingush law enforcement agencies have denied any involvement.

Arsanukayev was one of a handful of people who was genuinely trying to help the victims of the war in Chechnya. We wish him freedom and speedy return to his family.

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