

Ingush Disappeared

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Growing calls for authorities to take action over a recent spate of kidnappings.

Relatives of missing Ingush citizens staged a peaceful protest last week in an attempt to draw attention to a marked rise in kidnappings in the Soviet autonomous republic.

More than 20 people have gone missing in the past fortnight, and calls are mounting for an investigation into the alleged involvement of secret service or other security personnel.

Around 200 men gathered on the federal highway between Nazran and Magas on March 19, carrying banners reading "Release our relatives" and "[President] Zyazikov, stop this terror against your people" - a reference to suspicions that the state is behind the disappearances.

One protestor, who did not want to give his name, told IWPR that the crowd comprised relatives and supporters of only two of the disappeared. "The rest were evidently too scared to come here," he said.

Magomed Yandiev, an ethnic Ingush who fled Chechnya when the war broke out, described how his 25-year-old relative Timur was kidnapped on the afternoon of March 16, in the centre of Nazran.

According to eyewitnesses, armed men in masks grabbed him as he was leaving a building, bundled him into a white car and drove him away. "Both his whereabouts and the identity of the kidnapers are unknown," said Magomed.

"We are protesting to attract [Russian] President Vladimir Putin's attention - I wonder if he knows about the situation here."

Timur's work colleagues expressed bewilderment at his disappearance. His boss Magomed Ozdov told IWPR, "He did not belong to any radical Islamic groups, he is friendly and cheerful, and has a high level of training and professionalism which he is constantly improving. He is a stable person and doesn't have any bad habits.

"Furthermore, Timur is from a cultured family - he is the grandson of the renowned Ingush writer Akhmed Vedzizhev."

The speed and precision of the abductions and evidence that in some instances the kidnapers have worn army uniforms has led many to speculate that secret service or other security personnel are involved.

Magomed Mutsolgov, who was also present at the demonstration, told IWPR that his brother Bashir had been kidnapped on December 18, 2003, in Karabulak, a town on the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya. People in military uniform and masks pushed him into a car and drove off towards the federal highway, passing through a police checkpoint on the way.

"Police at the post who stopped this car saw the kidnapers, and later said that they were Federal Security

Service, FSB, employees working in Ingushetia,” he claimed.

“But in spite of appealing to the FSB, the prosecutor’s office and the presidents of Russia and Ingushetia, we still don’t know where he is, who took him, and what he is charged with.

“All this reminds me of 1937, when people disappeared from the street without investigation or trial. These [kidnappers] act like a real group of bandits.”

According to Mutsolgov, almost 100 people have been kidnapped in Ingushetia since September 2003, all in a similar fashion.

Ingushetia’s internal affairs department claims that it knows nothing about the spate of disappearances – and it also denied that any demonstration had taken place on March 19. “There was no protest in Ingushetia. There was an attempt to hold one, but it was postponed,” the department’s press service said.

According to Shakhman Akbulatov, an employee of the human rights centre Memorial, the disappearances have to be taken seriously and investigated by the authorities. “It is especially important, because until recently Ingushetia was a very peaceful place,” he said.

“It is now safe to say that the wave of ‘cleansing’ so rife in Chechnya has spread here.”

Timur Aliev is an IWPR correspondent in Chechnya.

Location: Stavropol
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