

Geneva

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The Russian Federation: Lawyers threatened with death in Dagestan need urgent protection

The International Commission of Jurists today expressed its grave concern at death threats received by lawyers Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov. The authors of the threats demanded that the lawyers cease their involvement in a case alleging the murder of five individuals.

The ICJ called on the authorities to take urgent protective measures to ensure the safety of lawyers who received these threats.

On 8 May, Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov took on a case to represent relatives of a local parliamentarian, Magomed Gamzatov, his brothers Osman, Yusup and Gazidibir and their cousin Magomed Omarov. The men were killed by firearms in the city of Kizlyar, Dagestan, on 18 March. According to relatives, the shootings resulted from a conflict of a personal nature. A criminal case was opened and several people arrested in relation to the killing. However, the relatives of the victims have alleged that they have been subjected to continuous surveillance and pressure. Witnesses reportedly now fear to testify in the case.

From the start the lawyers began to be subject to intimidation, which included threats that their professional offices would be set on fire or blown up with the lawyers inside. Such threats were delivered through acquaintances of the lawyers. On 19 and 20 May, after the two lawyers had announced a more proactive intervention in the case, including by inviting information from additional witnesses, the lawyers received text messages warning them that they should drop the case which was "their chance to stay alive". Another message demanded that they drop their involvement in the case and "not butt into something they should not do".

The ICJ considers that there is an imminent risk to the lives and physical security of lawyers, especially taking into account the recent case of murder of a lawyer in Dagestan. [On 20 January 2012, a lawyer in Dagestan was shot to death with the alleged involvement of security forces](#). According to the information received by the ICJ, the case has still not been properly investigated and no one has been held accountable.

The ICJ recalls that under international law and standards, Russia has an obligation to protect the right to life of individuals where there is a real and immediate risk to the life of an individual from the criminal acts of a third party. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers provide that "where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities".

Effective measures to protect the lawyers should include security measures as necessary, such as police monitoring and guards. This issuance of death threats constitutes criminal conduct. The ICJ called on the Russian authorities to promptly and thoroughly investigate these threats and to bring the perpetrators to justice in fair trials.

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