

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

Ref.: AL RUS 5/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

16 September 2025

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning **the arbitrary arrest and detention of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev, following the designation of the "international LGBT movement" as "extremist" and their death in custody.**

Previously, the special procedures mandate holders raised concerns regarding the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation designation of the "international LGBT movement" as "extremist", on 30 November 2023, effectively banning all real or perceived LGBT-related activities within the country. This decision was made following a request from the Ministry of Justice and was concluded in a closed-door session. This designation, with its vague and broad scope, allowing arbitrary interpretation and application, puts anyone at risk of criminal prosecution and imprisonment on extremism-related charges, facing between 6 up to 10 years of imprisonment (see OL RUS 28/2023).

Moreover, in my reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/54/54 and A/HRC/57/59) and the General Assembly (A/78/508), I have documented the evolution of the systematic repression of LGBT persons in Russia, achieving unprecedented levels since the full-scale invasion and war against Ukraine. I have noted that the risk of arbitrary detention and torture of LGBT persons in Chechnya, perpetrated with the acquiescence and, often, complicity of State actors, was now spreading across the entire country. I have collected a number of first-hand accounts from victims who fled Russia for safety, documenting severe torture and abuse in secret detention places, including electric shocks, beatings, waterboarding, and sexual violence. Released victims were often told their families should kill them to "clear their name" without fear of punishment (A/79/508, paras 91-92).

According to information received:

Andrei Kotov, a 48-years-old resident of Moscow, was the director of the travel agency "Men Travel". He was charged under article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for allegedly organizing and participating in "extremist" activities. According to the investigation, Kotov founded the travel agency to organize "trips for LGBT propaganda, creating an extremist community to promote non-traditional family values and undermine traditional marriage as defined by the Russian Constitution".

This is the seventh known criminal case initiated under article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, following the recognition of the

“international LGBT movement” as “extremist.”

According to his testimony, on 30 November, 15 unidentified law enforcement officers broke into his apartment and started beating him although he did not offer any resistance. Moreover, Russian state media published a video of him being questioned on the floor by two law enforcement authorities hiding their faces under balaclavas. In the footage of the arrest, Kotov is breathing heavily and his hands are cuffed behind his back. He denies any guilt or connection with the “extremist” movement. He explained that he was involved in organizing regular tourist trips, but police officers responded, “No, incorrect, for gays”.

On 2 December 2024, the Golovinsky District Court of Moscow remanded Kotov for two months in custody at Pre-Trial Detention Centre no. 5 (SIZO-5), known as “Vodnik”, in Moscow. During the court hearing Kotov reported being subjected to beatings and electric shocks during his arrest. Despite Kotov’s detailed court testimony describing torture, the judge failed to order an investigation.

A few days after his detention, Kotov was placed in solitary confinement for 15 days. His friend reported that it was impossible to send him essential medication, warm clothes or food while in solitary confinement. Kotov, a bodybuilder weighing 140 kilograms and a vegetarian, particularly needed food deliveries.

Reportedly, Kotov was “humiliated” in the pre-trial detention centre and “reclassified to a low social status” category. It is claimed that detention centre officers spread information among the detainees that Kotov was the organizer of trips for LGBT persons and identified as one himself. As a result, Kotov’s inmates were harassing him and extorting money from him.

A week before his death, the investigation brought additional charges against Kotov under article 242.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for the production of child pornography, citing “certain videos” allegedly found on his phone by law enforcement officers. Kotov’s lawyer has not seen the videos, as access to case files is granted only after the investigation is completed and before the case is sent to court, or after the case is closed.

On 29 December 2024, Kotov was found dead in his cell at the pre-trial detention centre in Moscow. The time of death was reported 4 a.m. and the preliminary cause of death was reported as suicide, with cuts found on his body. However, there has been no credible and independent investigation into the circumstances of his death.

Case of Viskhan Tazurkaev

Viskhan Tazurkaev, was a 19-year-old resident of Argun in Chechnya. He grew up in a family of teachers who worked at one of the local schools.

On 29 December 2024, he was arbitrarily detained at his workplace in Argun and taken to the Argun police department, where he was held on allegations of

homosexuality. It is believed that his detention was linked to his association with a friend who was gay, as authorities traced his contact through their network investigations.

During his detention, Viskhan was subjected to severe torture, including electric shocks, over a period of up to eight days, until he died. It is reported that his death took place while in detention in the period from 31 December 2024 and 5 January 2025. His body was then handed over to his family by the authorities, who instructed them to claim that he had committed suicide. According to other sources, he was handed over to his family shortly before he died.

The official report indicated that he died from a sudden illness, however, it was revealed at his funeral that he had died from torture.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, I express my serious concern over the death in custody of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev and the reported failure to date of Russian authorities to conduct prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigations, with the aim of holding perpetrators accountable and bringing justice and remedies to their families. I am concerned that these two cases fit a broader pattern of systematic repressions of LGBT persons in Russia, including grave human rights violations such as arbitrary detention, torture and death in custody.

If the above allegations prove to be true, they would constitute a violation of article 6 on the right to life and article 7 providing protection from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Russian Federation on 16 October 1973, as well as various articles of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), ratified by the Russian Federation on 3 March 1987. They would also constitute a violation of articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR on the rights to liberty and security of person, liberty and security of person, and access to a fair trial.

I remind your Excellency's Government that States have a heightened duty of care to take any necessary measures to protect the lives of individuals deprived of their liberty by the State given that by arresting, detaining, imprisoning or otherwise depriving individuals of their liberty, States parties assume the responsibility to care for their lives and bodily integrity. States assume a heightened duty of care and must take all necessary measures to protect lives of individuals deprived of their liberty. Loss of life occurring in custody creates a presumption of arbitrary deprivation of life by the State authorities, which can only be rebutted on the basis of a proper investigation that establishes the State's compliance with its obligations under article 6 of the ICCPR.

I note that the Investigative Committee of Russia initiated a preliminary inquiry into the death of Andrei Kotov, to investigate the circumstances that led to his death in SIZO-5. I also note that the Federal Service for the Execution of Punishments (FSIN) and the Prosecutor's Office have initiated their own inquiry into the event as well. I express my concern that the investigation might lack promptness and impartiality as the investigative institutions should act independently to impartially assess the role of the SIZO-5 officers for Kotov's death.

I express my grave concern regarding the lack of an investigation or preliminary inquiry into the death in custody of Viskhan Tazurkaev. I am troubled by the official report attributing his death to a sudden illness, despite no prior indication of illness, and the pressure exerted on his family to declare it a suicide. In my report to the General Assembly (A/79/508) I have documented cases of torture and death as a result of torture or summary executions of LGBT men in Chechnya, or instructing family members to murder their LGBT sons and daughters.

I remind your Excellency's Government that family members of victims of unlawful death have the right to equal and effective access to justice, as well as to adequate, effective and prompt reparation. I am concerned that Tazurkaev's family has thus far not received any legal, social or psychological assistance in connection with his death in custody.

I underscore the critical importance of taking urgent measures to address the aforementioned concerns. I stand ready to support your Excellency's Government with any efforts undertaken in this regard.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on any steps in place, or future efforts envisaged to ensure that all deaths in custody, including in the case of LGBT persons, are investigated in line with international standards including the Minnesota Protocol.
3. Please provide information on any steps envisaged to improve conditions in detention.
4. Please provide information on any and all investigations that have been conducted into the death of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev and the results of those investigations and how they comply with international standards including the Minnesota Protocol.
5. Please provide information on all measures and efforts taken or planned to be taken to investigate allegations of acts of torture and other ill-treatment in a prompt, impartial and effective manner, and to ensure that any public officials involved in such acts are prosecuted in line with obligations under international human rights law.

6. Please provide information on measures and safeguards that are aimed at preventing, in the future, occurrences of torture and other ill-treatment pursuant to articles 2 and 16 of the CAT.
7. Please provide information concerning any administrative or disciplinary action taken against any current or former State personnel or governmental authorities in connection with the deaths of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev.
8. Please explain what measures your Excellency's Government has taken to provide reparation to families of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev.
9. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that all LGBT persons are protected from death in custody, and lack of access to basic amenities in places of detention.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

I may publicly express my concerns in the near future as, in my view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. I also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that I have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mariana Katzarova
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant international norms and standards.

Torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

The prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is absolute and non-derogable (UDHR art. 5; ICCPR arts. 7 and 2(3); Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment arts. 1, 2, 15 and 16).¹ State parties to the CAT must exercise jurisdiction over said offences (art. 5), receive complaints and examine them promptly and impartially (art. 12). At no time shall torture be used to extract information or a confession (art. 1). Victims have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible (art. 14).

State parties to CAT have overarching obligations to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment via effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures (articles 2 and 16), to educate and train relevant personnel on the prohibition (art. 10) and to keep all rules, instructions, methods and practices relating to interrogation, custody and treatment under systematic review (art. 11).

Attached to the peremptory and absolute prohibition of torture are obligations to investigate all acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to prosecute or extradite suspects, to punish those responsible and to protect victims from reprisals and intimidation, and to provide remedies to victims. I refer your Excellency's Government to recommendations on investigations to be carried out in line with the United Nations Manual on the Effective Investigations and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ("the Istanbul Protocol" revised 2022 edition).

The standards of conditions and treatment of persons deprived of their liberty are contained in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules). All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings and the safety and security of prisoners shall be ensured at all times (rule 1). Procedures must be in place to ensure a secure audit trail of files pertaining to prisoners (rule 6) and young prisoners must be kept separate from adults (rule 11).

Death in custody

I refer your Excellency's Government to article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of persons". I also refer to articles 6 and 9 of the ICCPR which establish respectively

¹ See also A/77/502; A/HRC/52/30.

the right to life and the right to security. I refer in particular to the UN Human Rights Committee general comment No. 36 on article 6, which provides that individuals are entitled “to be free from acts and omissions that are intended or may be expected to cause their unnatural or premature death, as well as to enjoy a life with dignity.” The right to security of person refers to protection against physical or psychological injury, or physical and moral integrity.

In relation to the protection of the right to life, I underscore the importance of conducting investigations into all suspected unlawful killings in line with international standards, particularly the Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions and the Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of a Potentially Unlawful Death (2016)). In this sense, States have an obligation to investigate and punish serious human rights violations, including summary or arbitrary killings (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para 18). Failure to investigate and prosecute such violations is in itself a breach of the norms of human rights treaties.

Further underscoring the importance of effective investigation, I reiterate that, when the State detains an individual, it is held to a heightened level of diligence in protecting that individual’s rights. Therefore, when an individual dies as a consequence of injuries sustained while in State custody, there is a presumption of State responsibility. In order to overcome the presumption of State responsibility for a death resulting from injuries sustained in custody, there must be a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions (principle 9 of the Principles of the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions).

The duty to protect the life of all detained individuals includes providing them with the necessary medical care and appropriate regular monitoring of their health, shielding them from inter-prisoner violence, preventing suicides and providing reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities (UN Human Rights Committee general comment No. 36). A heightened duty to protect the right to life also applies to juvenile institutions.

Remedies

In relation to the right to a remedy, the Minnesota Protocol states that “family members of victims of unlawful death have the right to equal and effective access to justice; to adequate, effective and prompt reparation; to recognition of their status before the law; and to have access to relevant information concerning the violations and relevant accountability mechanisms.

Full reparation includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, guarantees of non-repetition, and satisfaction. Satisfaction includes government verification of the facts and public disclosure of the truth, an accurate accounting for of the legal violations, sanctions against those responsible for the violations, and the search for the disappeared and for the bodies of those killed. Family members have the right to seek and obtain information on the causes of a killing and to learn the truth about the circumstances, events and causes that led to it. In cases of potentially unlawful death,

families have the right, at a minimum, to information about the circumstances, location and condition of the remains and, insofar as it has been determined, the cause and manner of death.”