

April 20, 2017

Mr. Gianni Infantino  
President  
Fédération Internationale de Football Association  
Zurich, Switzerland

Sent by email to: [gianni.infantino@fifa.org](mailto:gianni.infantino@fifa.org)

***Re: Detention, torture, and killing of LGBT people in Russia's Chechen Republic and threats against independent Russian media***

Dear Mr. Infantino,

Last June you met our delegation from the Sport and Rights Alliance to discuss human rights concerns associated with FIFA's operations worldwide. We appreciate the ongoing dialogue between our organizations.

We are writing to you in the context of Russia hosting the 2018 World Cup, to ask you to immediately and directly call on President Vladimir Putin to end the brutal campaign against gay men that is sweeping Chechnya and insist that the government respect freedom of expression and freedom of the media. We consider this a matter of utmost urgency.

Since late February, police in Chechnya have rounded up dozens of men believed to be gay, held them in secret places of detention, tortured them, and exposed them to imminent risk of honor killings. At least three of these men have died. Several organizations, including Human Rights Watch, have independently documented evidence of this pattern of appalling violence.

In addition, top Chechen officials have threatened the Russian journalist who first broke the story as well as the news outlet she works for, *Novaya Gazeta*.

We note that FIFA's April 2016 statutes state, "FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognized human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights." A 2016 [report](#) by business and human rights expert John Ruggie calls on FIFA to "translate its commitment to respect human rights...into its daily actions and decisions" and to start "[b]uilding and using its leverage" to address human rights risks in World Cup host countries.

***Violence against Gay Men in Chechnya***

Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, and Russia's authorities are obligated to uphold the rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in domestic legislation and international human rights treaties, equally throughout the country. But the Russian government is failing to protect gay men in Chechnya from serious violence and threats to their lives.

Anti-gay social attitudes and homophobia are widespread in Chechnya and Russia. In Chechnya, these attitudes are fueled by the leadership of the local

strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov. LGBT people are in danger of being attacked by the authorities as well as being victims of “honor killings” perpetrated by their own relatives—a lawless practice against those who supposedly tarnish family honor.

Local officials deny that there are any gay men in Chechnya, and as a consequence have denied the kidnapping and beating of gay men. Though victims in theory can file complaints with local authorities, they face serious risks to their safety when they do so, and federal officials fail to acknowledge that victims need concrete, effective security guarantees if they are to formally lodge complaints. As a result, these crimes often go unpunished.

### ***Threats Against the Media***

On April 3, Chechen television broadcast a gathering of Chechnya’s religious leaders and public figures, together with what it said was a crowd of 15,000 local residents protesting the April 1 *Novaya Gazeta* article exposing the allegations of abuse of gay men. In a speech to the crowd, an adviser to Kadyrov accused *Novaya Gazeta* of defamation and called its journalists “enemies of our faith and of our motherland.” The crowd adopted a resolution that threatened retribution against the journalists “wherever they are and without any statute of limitations.” On April 15, Chechnya’s press and information minister sent a letter to *Novaya Gazeta*’s editor calling the article a “filthy provocation,” and threatening that people who are “more annoyed by your newspaper than we are” would silence the newspaper.

Elena Milashina, the *Novaya Gazeta* reporter who uncovered Kadyrov’s anti-gay purge, is well-known for her courageous reporting on human rights in Chechnya. Anna Politkovskaya, previously *Novaya Gazeta*’s leading journalist covering Chechnya, was shot dead in a contract killing over 10 years ago.

The government’s response to open threats against journalists and *Novaya Gazeta* has been slow. Initially, on April 14, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said only the Kremlin had received a letter from *Novaya Gazeta*’s editor about the threats, and that the Kremlin was following the situation closely. He also deplored any action that would “threaten the life or safety of journalists.”

The authorities opened an investigation into the threats against *Novaya Gazeta* and its journalists and into the allegations of abuse of gay men in Chechnya on April 18. Press coverage of an April 19 meeting with President Vladimir Putin shows Kadyrov denying allegations about the anti-gay purge, which strongly indicates that President Putin raised the issue with him.

### ***FIFA’s Responsibilities and Opportunities to Secure Human Rights Protections***

FIFA’s statutes clearly state its commitment to international human rights standards. FIFA is also uniquely positioned to press Russian authorities at the highest level to resolutely condemn the abductions, torture, and killing of gay men

in Chechnya and threats against the media, and to ensure thorough, transparent investigations into these serious allegations.

Given the seriousness of the situation and the level of the threat, we ask you to personally intervene with President Putin urging him to take action to protect LGBT people in imminent danger of torture, enforced disappearances, and extra-judicial killings in Chechnya. We are convinced that the international outcry about the violence prompted the Kremlin to launch an investigation and raise the issue in Putin's meeting with Kadyrov. This pressure needs to be maintained to ensure the violence ends once and for all.

Without prompt action, the 2018 World Cup risks perpetuating one poor legacy of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, which were marred by Russia's 2013 discriminatory anti-LGBT propaganda law and the platform for discrimination and violence against LGBT people created by the law.

We also urge you to press the Russian authorities to state publicly that, as World Cup Host, Russia will ensure, without discrimination, the safety and the freedom of expression and association of all athletes, coaches, fans, journalists, and others who will attend or participate in the competition.

Finally, we believe that a clear public statement from FIFA regarding support for LGBT rights and calling on all future hosts, including Russia, to demonstrate equal and unequivocal commitment to LGBT rights protection would be key in pressing Russia to reverse its discriminatory course.

We look forward to your reply. You may be in contact with Minky Worden ([wordenm@hrw.org](mailto:wordenm@hrw.org)) at Human Rights Watch on behalf of the Sports and Rights Alliance.

Sincerely,

Football Supporters Europe  
Human Rights Watch  
Terres Des Hommes  
Transparency International Germany