



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

May 22, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you know, the situation in Chechnya continues to be extraordinarily dangerous for men who are gay, bisexual or who have been suspected of homosexuality. Since news first broke about the arrests in early April, we know that more than 100 men have been arrested and detained without charges, and while some have been set free, reports indicate that many remain in detention, where they have been beaten and tortured, and at least three have been killed.

While we understand that new arrests have stopped, the situation remains extremely dangerous. There are reports that – after being encouraged by the Chechen government – families have carried out “honor killings” against relatives they think are gay, and that those who have fled Chechnya are hardly more secure in places like Moscow, where Chechen authorities can still track them down. Meanwhile, women have begun to come forward with reports of their own mistreatment due to suspicions that they are lesbians, or know of gay men. There is simply no safe place in Russia for them and even Europe can be dangerous since Chechen communities there have strong networks, capable of tracking them down and bringing them back to Chechnya.

It was therefore greatly disturbing to see recent reports that the U.S. government may be discouraging Russian activists from applying for U.S. visas. While I understand it is indeed difficult for them to obtain U.S. visas, it is imperative that the U.S. immediately take every possible step to help the victims find their way safety – and to clearly communicate that the U.S. is pursuing every option, so that the victims do not lose hope. No door should be shut prematurely. Whether that be through “humanitarian parole,” or through the refugee system, or through other countries that can process them more quickly, the U.S. must show leadership in helping people who face such grave threats to their fundamental human rights. The people fleeing Chechnya are being persecuted because of who they are and who they love, and it is our responsibility to step up and protect them from despotic leaders who seek to harm them.

Meanwhile, I want to renew my call from early April for you and President Trump to forcefully condemn the atrocities in Chechnya. While Ambassador Haley made a statement, and the State Department issued a statement, it is deeply disappointing and troubling that there has not yet been a statement from you or from the White House. The U.S. must not step back from its traditional role as a human rights leader and as a spokesman for the world's most vulnerable. Failure to speak out against these atrocities signals to dictators and human rights violators that the U.S. will turn a blind eye to their crimes. We must serve as a beacon of hope, and not only serve a set of narrowly-defined interests.

I urge you to do the right thing and act now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chad Griffin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chad Griffin
President
Human Rights Campaign