
For Immediate Release

July 8, 2013

Public Statement

The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concerns about the death threats received by lawyers Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov

Toronto – The Law Society of Upper Canada* condemns the intimidation and harassment of lawyers and activists in Russia.

Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov are criminal defence lawyers working in the North Caucasus region of Dagestan in Russia. Both lawyers have previously worked on cases dealing with corruption and allegations of human rights violations by members of the state and law enforcement agencies, including allegations of torture, extra-judicial killings and abductions.

Ms. Magomedova and Mr. Suslanov are currently working on a high profile criminal case, representing the families of five men killed in March 2012. On May 19, 2013, Musa Suslanov received a text message from an unknown mobile phone number, telling him and his colleague to withdraw from the case if they wish to stay alive. The following day, Sapiyat Magomedova received a similar message from the same number. In addition to the threatening text messages, both lawyers subsequently received further threats of physical violence and of arson and bomb attacks on their offices if they do not cease their work on this case.

The threats against Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov present imminent risks to their lives and physical security. Criminal defence lawyers in the North Caucasus region have previously been subject to human rights violations, including threats, harassment and even death, as a result of their work. Such allegations are oftentimes accompanied by an apparent failure by state authorities to adequately investigate the incidents and prosecute the perpetrators.

International human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary*, state that judicial independence and respect for human rights are essential to advancing the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the Russian authorities to:

- a. promptly, effectively and impartially investigate the death threats received by Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice;
- b. ensure that lawyers Sapiyat Magomedova and Musa Suslanov are provided with protection and security in accordance with their wishes;
- c. put an end to all acts of harassment, including at the judicial level, against human rights lawyers and other human rights defenders in Russia;

- d. ensure that all lawyers can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without intimidation, harassment, fear of physical violence or other human rights violations;
- e. conform in all circumstances with the provisions of the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* and the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*; and
- f. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Russia.

**The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for some 44,400 lawyers and 5,100 paralegals in the Province of Ontario, Canada, and the Treasurer is the head of the Law Society. The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.*

The Law Society urges the legal community to intervene in support of members of the legal profession in Russia in their effort to advance the respect of human rights and to promote the rule of law.

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For more information, please contact Lisa Hall at 416-947-7625 or lhall@lsuc.on.ca.