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Thor Halvorssen
PRESIDENT

September 26, 2011

Dear Shakira,

According to an AFP wire and officials from the Chechen Government, on October 5 you will attend the birthday of the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, in Grozny. I'm writing to inform you of the critical human rights situation in Chechnya, explain the role that the president has played in this situation, and request that you cancel your attendance.

According to the human rights foundation Memorial, since Vladimir Putin appointed Ramzan Kadyrov as the President of the Chechen Republic in 2007, Kadyrov is accused of using torture, causing disappearances, and authorizing extrajudicial executions. Additionally, Kadyrov has imposed a strict Islamic moral code, enforced by the police, which restricts freedom of expression. These measures promote discrimination against women and sexual minorities.

Chechen officials estimate that, since 1994, more than 160,000 people have died in the conflict between Russia, the legitimate government of Chechnya (in exile), the government appointed by Russia, and terrorist groups. Since 2000, there have been thousands of undocumented deaths whose bodies are believed to be buried in one of the country's 52 mass graves. The Chechen Interior Ministry reported in 2000 that there were 15,000 people under arrest because of the conflict, and Memorial holds that between December 2006 and February 2007 there was 26 arbitrary detentions.

On July 3, 2010, Kadyrov stated publicly that the human rights defenders of his country were the "people's enemies." Kadyrov's attitude became more hostile after the murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya on October 7, 2006. Politkovskaya was killed while investigating allegations of torture committed by the Kadyrov government.

In July 2009, Natalia Estemirova, director of Memorial and Politkovskaya's best friend, was kidnapped and killed. Estemirova, who investigated human rights violations carried out by Kadyrov, had a private meeting with the Chechen president during which, according to Memorial director Oleg Orlov, Kadyrov himself threatened and insulted Estemirova. The case remains unsolved.

Dear Shakira, obviously this is just a brief overview of Chechnya`s situation and the human rights violations in which Mr. Kadyrov has been involved. If you wish, I could describe in detail the crimes of Kadyrov and his government with more information, photos, videos, and books.

Considering this information, with a great respect and appreciation for your work as an artist, I believe that your participation in the birthday celebration of a political leader involved in such serious allegations of human rights violations would be improper for a public figure of your standing, conscientiousness, and commitment to human rights related issues.

I am sending this letter asking you to urgently consider canceling your attendance of the birthday of the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, scheduled for October 5 in Grozny.

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact me at +1.212.246.8486 or by email.

Sincerely,

Thor Halvorsen
President
Human Rights Foundation

** This letter is a translation of the original letter sent to Shakira in Spanish on Sept 26, 2011*