Written Testimony of **Ali Israilov** for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing of April 15, 2011.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me here today. A lot has been said already about the disastrous situation in Chechnya. I have personally experienced firsthand the horrors of this regime.

One morning while at work, Kadyrov's men came and ordered me to go with them as Kadyrov demanded to see me. I knew I had no choice but to follow them. When I got into their car, I was surprised to see that they already had picked up my wife from our home. I knew why they came for me: two weeks earlier I had sent my oldest son out of the country to escape from being forced to work for Kadyrov as his bodyguard. I was then kept in their custody for approximately one year. For the first four days I was in Kadyrov's home, in his personal prison. While there, I was tortured, including through electric shocks, and beaten up for close to every moment of my stay there. I witnessed Kadyrov torture others. The only thing they wanted me to tell them was where my son was. Once they found his telephone number in my cell phone, they called him and found out he was in Poland. Despite their question being answered, they kept me detained and beat me up incessantly. After four days of this intensive torture session, they transferred me to one of their basements, in the town of Gudermes. I was kept there for another eleven months.

Not only I endured every conceivable form of torture, but I personally witnessed scores of people being taken there like I was. I realized that this was a well-organized machine: people were taken in constantly, tortured, broken, sometimes killed, and thrown out either out or to another location. I understood very quickly why they couldn't keep them all there: there were just too many of us. In this basement, just like in Kadyrov's home, acts of torture were on-going day and night, 24/7.

When I was released I had two choices: take up the arms to get justice that way, as many others do in Chechnya, or to seek a legal path and file a formal criminal complaint. My son and I chose the latter option. We filed complaint after complaint, up to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg. At the time, now years ago, I was convinced that this was the right decision. Today, I wonder about it. My son was murdered one afternoon on the street of Vienna in January 2009. The only reason he was shot to death was because he had became a unique and most embarrassing witness. My son had personally seen Kadyrov torture people and had been tortured by Kadyrov's own hands.

Kadyrov and his men are still acting in complete impunity, beyond any reach of the law. My son is gone, I have to live in hiding, our cases before the European Court have gone nowhere in five years. So I wonder: was this the right choice? Is the only thing that came out of this, my son's murder?

What I am committed to today is to bring my son's murderers to trial. There is currently a trial going on in Vienna, and for once before an independent court of law. The judge has subpoenaed Kadyrov and some of his men involved in the murder to testify. To this day,

the Russian justice has refused to cooperate and none of the witnesses called have participated to the trial. In addition, the actual killer, who had not been captured and managed to go back to Chechnya, was awarded money and benefits. He lives under his real name, in complete freedom, despite the Viennese court's personal indictment against him. During the trial, some of the Chechen witnesses would go back on their earlier testimony, due to pressure and threats exercised by the Kadyrov regime. The judge warned the witnesses that false testimony is a crime under Austrian law, but the fear of Kadyrov regime is much greater than any other. And I cannot blame those witnesses knowing what they have done to my son and I. Because of the lack of cooperation from Russian and Chechnya authorities, the proceedings have been going on for over a year. We are very far from bringing the true responsible to justice for this crime.

I am here today to formally urge you to take all the necessary and possible measures to help us put an end to this impunity. And bear in mind that Kadyrov's crimes are approved by Moscow. The United States who have various bilateral agreements with Russia should use them as a leverage to bring peace and justice to our exhausted Republic.

Thank you for your attention,

Ali Israilov