

Friday, 23 September 2016, 13:15 'Hostages of the Kremlin': increase of the number of Ukrainian political prisoners in the Russian Federation and the illegally occupied Crimea, Open Dialog Foundation and the Center for Civil Liberties side-event on Ukrainian political prisoners in the Russian Federation and the illegally occupied Crimea - Speech of Gennady Afanasiev

(English text below)

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Gennady Afanasiev

I was born in Simferopol in 1990 just before Ukraine gained it's independence. I have university degree in law and also was working as a professional photographer. During Russian occupation of the Crimea I was helping Ukrainian soldiers placed in the Crimea, took part in protest actions against the occupation of the peninsula. At first I hadn't accepted Maidan because of the propaganda and speculations in the peninsula, but later I understood what was happening and became the supporter of Maidan.

On 9th of May 2014 I took a part in the Victory Day parade in Simferopol. I was walking in the line holding a picture of my great grandfather. He is a pride of the family – he participated in World War II.

Suddenly, some men in civilian clothes with automatic rifles hit me on my way (later they turned out to be FSB officers) and pushed me in the car.

In the car they threw me on the floor and put a bag on my head. While driving they were punching me in the stomach and head, inquiring of the participants of pro-Ukrainian protests and threatening me saying they would take me to the forest and I would dig my own grave.

Finally, they drove to my house – they had already known where I lived. They took the keys from my apartment and guided me inside with a bag on my head, then threw me on the floor. They made a search, but didn't find anything.

Then they took me to FSB office and from there – to the cold basement, where I spent 10 days. All this time they didn't let me sleep and eat.

On the first day they were only beating me. I was chained to the iron table.

I didn't have a lawyer, but I was surrounded by investigators from Moscow, stout Caucasian boys, FSB officers. They tried to get me talking, threatened me. When they had understood that I didn't have the information they needed, they demanded from me self-incrimination. I must have admitted that on 9th of May I wanted to explode the Eternal Light memorial. The absurdity of these demands was in the fact that they had detained me in front of the people when I had been walking to the memorial in the solemn procession!

During the first 5 days FSB officers tried to get me to talk. They were beating me in the head wearing boxing gloves not to cause bruises. They were simply putting a plastic bag on my head, suffocating me, then beating me again... But I kept silence.

It turned out to be a good attitude. Then real tortures began.

It's not pleasant to hear that, but I have to tell what I have overcome again and again. People should know what happens to someone who is under unlawful imprisonment in Russia. I am not the only one. During more than 2 years I saw many people: not all of them were treated with such a cruelty – only the ones, whom they needed. Or the ones, who stood in their way.

They put on my head a gas-mask with a hose, unscrew a lower valve and sprayed the gas inside – I started to throw up and choke with my own vomit. When I was losing consciousness, they were putting the mask off, giving me sal ammoniac to smell – and repeated the whole action. Because of the cruel tortures I pled guilty.

Then they became interested in Oleksandr Kolchenko and Oleh Sentsov. I refused to bear witness against them. In response they connected electric wires to my genitals and electrocuted me. THAT was the way to make people sign beforehand-prepared documents.

At the end, they demanded from me a plea agreement. They took off my clothes, pressed me down to the floor and started to pass a soldering iron near my body telling me what would happen when this burning hot instrument appears under me.

The main thing was that they threatened to come to my mother, and that gave an effect.

During the trial of Oleksandr Kolchenko and Oleh Sentsov I rescinded my previous testimony in front of many witnesses and told about the tortures and the ways they made me witness against innocent people, whom I even hadn't known before. The revenge didn't keep me waiting: now FSB officers beat me in Rostov. Fortunately, because of the independent lawyers and Human Rights defenders I managed to record the traumas. But no one of these officers stood trial for these actions.

But the vendetta continued – FSB transferred me to the modern Gulag, the colony in the Komi Republic.

The transfer was really hard – air temperature reached 40-45 degrees, railroad cars were so hot that they should have been cooled down by a firefighting vehicle. There was neither water, nor toilets inside those railroad cars.

There, in the Komi Republic, I caught a severe illness. My body was covered with wounds that didn't skin over. But when they finally gave me some pills, the pills caused inflammation of the digestive organs...

They kept me in a solitary cell. 2 months and 15 days I was constantly on my own, I didn't see anyone and didn't talk to anyone except prison administration and the security service.

...This story is a very short version of the events that happened to us over a period of 2 years.

Every day for a person, who stays in a solitary cell, in captivity and under tortures is like a whole movie. Horror movie that is shown every day.

We could continue our story for hours – about unlawful investigations in Russia, about the fates of other boys and girls, who were with us...

What can I advise other Ukrainians, who are captured by Russia?

Better not to be captured at all, because it's senseless to count on fair trial and humane treatment.

But I address the international community to fight for these Kremlin prisoners, who are still captured, to support their families and to maintain sanctions regime against Russia until the Kremlin meets its commitments.

Don't forget about those innocent people suffering in Russian prisons every day.