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Occupied Crimea: torture and lack of protection mechanisms

Human rights organizations, including the Crimean Human Rights Group, regularly record cases connected with torture by the Russian authorities and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the territory of the occupied Crimea.

First of all, this relates to the politically motivated cases against Ukrainian citizens. It is reliably known about the use of torture against Alexander Kostenko, Andrei Kolomiets, and the figurants of the case of "Ukrainian saboteurs" Yevgeny Panov, Andrei Zakhtei and Vladimir Prisich. At the same time, all attempts made by lawyers to initiate the investigation regarding torture were completely ignored by the Russian authorities.

The situation with tortures continues to get worse steadily. Last week in Crimea there was another indicative case: Renat Paralamov was abducted by Federal Security Service (FSS) officers from his own house and taken to an unknown destination. For more than a day neither his relatives nor lawyers were able to find out his location. After Paralamov signed testimony against himself and other people being subjected to cruel torture, he was thrown out at a bus station in Simferopol severely injured.

This situation became possible due to the fact of the occupation of Crimea, and due to the fact that the Russian Federation regards the peninsula as its territory, it does not recognize the mandate of international organizations to work in Crimea as part of Ukraine. As a consequence, victims are deprived of standard international mechanisms for protection against torture.

In particular, representatives of neither the UN Committee against Torture nor the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment can visit Crimea. The UN monitoring mission in Ukraine also cannot effectively conduct its work without having the opportunity to visit Crimea. The work opportunities of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International are also significantly limited.

Under such conditions, torture and cruel treatment have become common practice used by the police and the FSS. These methods allow the actual authorities of the peninsula to compel detainees to give confessions, induce them to conclude a deal with the investigation, force them to refuse the services of lawyers under the agreement in favour of court-appointed lawyers that work together with the FSS. To achieve these goals, victims are often beaten, tortured, throttled, threatened with sexual violence, and blackmailed by the fate of their loved ones.

It should also be noted that the treatment and conditions of detention of persons in police custody and penitentiary establishments in Crimea are cruel, inhuman and degrading. There are also evidences of convicts who were tortured for refusing from the Russian citizenship; they were sent to a punishment cell or were put under the pressure through other prisoners. Ill-treatment is also used during the transportation of people from pre-detention centres to the court hearings. Prisoners continue to be transferred to Russia, where there are already documented cases of the facts of denial in medical assistance and death of convicted citizens of Ukraine.

According to our calculations, more than 60 people have been prosecuted in regards to the politically motivated cases in Crimea since the occupation of the peninsula. 40 of those are currently serving sentences in places of detention, 10 people are under investigation, 10 people were convicted in criminal cases, the judgments for which was conditional or in the form of a fine.

We demand that the authorities of the Russian Federation stop the use of torture, conduct an effective investigation of cases of torture, bring to justice those responsible for the use of torture, and immediately release all political prisoners which were illegally detained in the Russian Federation and occupied Crimea, let the international organizations that have a mandate to carry out its activities in Ukraine to work in Crimea, ensure free access of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights without any ultimatums or political conditions.