



Statements of the Eastern Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives (based in Kyiv, Ukraine)

The Eastern Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives (hereinafter: EUCCI) dedicated to protecting human rights and concentrated on human rights violations which took place in Donbas in the course of armed conflict.

Since April 2014, thousands of combatants and civilians have been illegally detained, subjected to inhuman conditions of detention, torture and sexual violence. Based on the testimonies provided by victims, the EUCCI was able to identify the exact location of at least 121 detention facilities located on separatist-controlled territories. In contrast, at least 17 detention facilities (and the EUCCI were able to identify the exact location of at least 10 facilities) were identified on territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.

Conditions in illegal places of detention can be recognized as very poor. Facilities used for imprisonment were not equipped for holding people. According to the testimonies of victims released from illegal places of detention established by illegal armed groups, it can be stated that they were subjected to both physical and psychological violence. Torture and ill-treatment were used towards all groups of detained people, including civilians, military servants and people from vulnerable groups (pregnant women and elderly people).

The EUCCI has also documented cases of sexual violence. By August 2018, more than 300 individuals had been interviewed, of these interviews at least 60 witness statements contained evidence of sexual violence. The primary victims of sexual violence were women, as well as certain categories of male detainees. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used to ‘break’ detainees into confession or cooperation. It should be noted that all conduct alleged above amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Even though the intensity of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine has decreased, deprivation of liberty is still a common and widespread practice as of today.

Recommendations

The OSCE/ODIHR:

1. To use all possible diplomatic and economic means of influence in order to stop the Russian Federation in its conduct of the hybrid war in Donbas and its support of the illegal armed groups of the so-called LPR and DPR. Such common actions of the international community are most likely to reduce gross and systemic violations of human rights, in particular, torture, sexual violence, cruel and inhuman treatment of hostages and prisoners of war.

2. To constantly demand from the representatives of the armed groups of the so-called LPR and DPR, as well as the Russian Federation, compliance with the Minsk Agreements in relation to the exchange of “all for all”; to publicly condemn the disgraceful practice of taking civilians hostage, torture, sexual violence, cruel and inhuman treatment of hostages and prisoners of war.

3. To conduct immediate visits to all places of illegal detention in Eastern Ukraine in order to verify information about detention of people in these places and provide prisoners with necessary assistance. There has to be a detailed inspection, categorization, and assessment of all the indicated places of illegal detention for the purpose of documenting the crimes committed in the course of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.