

Crimes never end on the territory of the Chechen Republic.

In the first place, it should be noted that tortures and murders committed by state agents are still a very serious and burning problem in Russia. Nevertheless, the reaction of the authorities towards reports about such crimes is very much different in various Russian regions. While in Central Russia we face reluctance of the Prosecutor's Office to investigate into such offenses, in the Chechen Republic, where ill-treatment is extremely cruel, the authorities are openly resisting the activities of human rights defenders under such cases.

As all of you know, it is getting more and more dangerous to work with complaints about tortures and other forms of cruel treatment in Chechnya. Independent public investigations on the territory of the Republic are at risk, since nowadays human rights defenders jeopardize their lives working there and are often killed. For this reason several human rights organizations have stopped their activities in Chechnya; in the present conditions the lives and health of their staff and their workers' families are at stake, and it is impossible to conduct an effective investigation and support victims.

Against that background, at the end of 2009 the Committee Against Torture decided to work in the Chechen Republic using the method of Joint Mobile Groups. This method allows human rights defenders to promptly respond to human rights violations, it was proposed and elaborated by us and further adopted by other NGOs. Joint Mobile Groups are formed from the personnel of NGOs - members of the Public Commission for Chechnya - and are constantly present in the Republic. By now, the Joint Mobile Groups have worked almost one year in Chechnya and are dealing with several cases, mainly concerning murders and enforced disappearances. The environment in which we have to work makes us evacuate applicants and witnesses to other regions with the support of the OMCT (Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture) to save their lives. They are constantly intimidated, sometimes even face actual reprisals. The state programme for the protection of witnesses which we have tried to use under one case has proved to be totally ineffective in Chechnya. Our attempts to make the authorities transfer our cases for investigation to other regions have failed as well, while local investigators are actively opposing any progress under such cases, and being themselves afraid for their lives, do not summon alleged perpetrators for interrogation. Case files of criminal cases consist only of evidence collected by the Joint Mobile Groups.

Our Joint Mobile Groups are dealing with only a very limited share of killings and abductions committed on the territory of the Republic in 2009-2010, since victims are afraid to apply even to human rights defenders, and dare to speak about crimes only when they are guaranteed that this information will be kept secret.

To summarize:

1. Tortures, extra-judicial executions and abductions are still actively used by the local authorities on the territory of the region.
2. Since these offenses are perpetrated under the wardship of high-standing local officials, the local investigation authorities refuse to investigate into such cases.

Therefore, it is necessary:

1. To transfer such cases to other regions for investigation to ensure an independent inquiry.

2. To review the state system for the protection of victims and witnesses to make it efficient in respect of Chechen cases as well.
3. However, the most important thing is that there should be a strong political will and commitment to investigate into extra-judicial executions and abductions effectively and to form a positive investigative practice and case law in respect of Chechen cases. The efforts of human rights defendants are not sufficient to change the situation in the region.