

UKRAINE



CONTINUOUS ABDUCTIONS OF PEOPLE BY RUSSIAN ARMY

According to the Ukrainian human rights commissioner, 14,000 civilians have been abducted by the Russian army. The United Nations (UN) reports severe torture and terrible detention conditions. IDEA editor Erika Gitt spoke to a human rights activist about the fate of the Ukrainian abductees.

Olena Tsyhipa has been living in a state of emergency for more than two years. Instead of having a leisurely breakfast with her husband in the morning, she starts the day alone with a prayer for his release. Her husband, 63-year-old journalist Sergiy Tsyhipa, was arrested at a checkpoint in the Kherson region of southern Ukraine on 12 March 2022. The so-called Russian 'Supreme Court' in Crimea, which is only around 100 kilometres away, sentenced him to 13 years in a penal colony for alleged espionage. He is said to be in penal colony no. 3 in Skopin in central Russia. Olena initially needed strong tranquillisers and psychological help. Therapy finally gave her new strength to fight for her husband.

Torture and Rape

The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) lists 60 cases like that of Sergiy Tsyhipa on its website. According to an IGF employee in the Eastern Europe department, Valeriia Liamzienko, abducted Ukrainians are usually sent to unofficial detention centres after their abduction. According to her, the conditions there are terrible and the inmates have to endure them for up to six months. After that, the predominantly male civilians are sent to remand prisons or penal colonies in Russia. Up to 20 people share a four-man cell.

Secondly, people are punished for their clear pro-Ukrainian stance and refusal to recognise Russia as an authority. 'Last but not least, the Russians also kidnap Ukrainian civilians to replenish their exchange fund,' adds the Ukraine expert from Luhansk. The Russians categorise abducted civilians as 'prisoners of war' and use them to fill their prisoner exchange lists. According to international law, civilians should actually be released without compensation, says Liamzienko.

The Russian side wanted stun guns. But there is also talk of rape or the threat of rape, as well as mutilations and mock executions. According to Liamzienko, the food is poor and there is no medical care. For Tsyhipa, who has a heart condition and suffers from prostatitis, this is a catastrophe

Civilians in exchange for soldiers

For Liamzienko, there is a calculation behind the abduction of Ukrainian civilians: on the one hand, the Russian military hopes to gain valuable information through interrogations and to get back as many valuable military personnel as possible without having to hand over



14,000 Ukrainian civilians are believed to have been abducted by the Russian army © ISHR

the same number of army personnel to Ukraine.

Praying for the abductees

Liamzienko encourages people to stand up for abducted Ukrainian civilians: 'The more pressure German society exerts on the Russian authorities, the greater the chances that the prisoners will survive.' Olena Tsyhipa and the 83-year-old mother of the abducted Sergiy are also praying for this.

By Erika Gitt