

Civic Solidarity Platform Working Group on the Fight Against Torture
Civic Solidarity Platform Turkmenistan Working Group
Crude Accountability

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN CHECHNYA, RUSSIA



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About the Project

In 2022-2023, Crude Accountability, in cooperation with members of the [Turkmenistan Working Group](#) and the [Working Group on the Fight Against Torture](#) of the [Civic Solidarity Platform](#) (CSP), initiated a project to research the issue of enforced disappearances in the region of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

With generous funding from [Austausch, e.V.](#), a German human rights NGO, the project focuses on the issue of enforced disappearances within the context of the OSCE December 2020 decision, which was adopted by consensus at the Ministerial Council Meeting in Tirana, Albania in December 2020, for an [expanded OSCE commitment on torture prevention](#). This commitment includes the fight against enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention.

Focusing on the Balkans, Belarus, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine, the project draws attention to the ongoing horrors of enforced disappearances in the context of conflict and repression. The Balkans, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ukraine provide examples of enforced disappearances in conflict zones—both as a tool of regimes and armies, and as a product of war. Belarus, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are examples of regimes that use enforced disappearance as a tool of repression, even in peacetime. However, the use of enforced disappearances in all seven regions is one that is related to repression, as our policy papers demonstrate.

About Crude Accountability

Crude Accountability is a non-profit organization committed to defending the human rights and environment of communities affected by oil and gas development in the Caspian and the Black Sea regions. Crude Accountability works to hold governments and corporations accountable for their actions and advocate for sustainable and just energy practices. For more information, please visit Crude Accountability's website at <https://crudeaccountability.org>

About Civic Solidarity Platform

Civic Solidarity Platform is a network of human rights NGOs, activists, and experts from across Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The platform collaborates to promote and protect human rights, democratic principles, and civil society participation within the OSCE region. For more information, visit <https://www.civicsolidarity.org/>

About the Authors

Oleg Orlov

Oleg Petrovich Orlov, born in 1953, is a Russian human rights defender. He graduated from Moscow State University's Biology Department and worked in his field. In 1979, he independently produced and distributed leaflets opposing the Soviet troops' occupation in Afghanistan. In 1981, he did the same to support the independent *Solidarity* trade union in Poland.

Orlov played a role in founding the *Memorial* Society and worked as an assistant to Deputy Sergei Kovalev. From 1990 to 1993, he served in the Committee for Human Rights of the Supreme Soviet of Russia. He was involved in the leadership of the International *Memorial* and the Human Rights Center *Memorial*, both of which were dissolved by Russian authorities.

In June 1995, Orlov participated in negotiations with terrorists who had seized 1,500 hostages in Budennovsk under the command of Shamil Basayev. After successful negotiations, he and other members of the group led by Sergei Kovalev became voluntary hostages, guaranteeing the agreements reached and the release of most hostages.

Between 2014 and 2016, Orlov traveled multiple times to the conflict zone in eastern Ukraine, gathering information on human rights and international humanitarian law compliance.

In June 2023, Orlov faced a trial in Moscow, accused of "discrediting" the Russian armed forces in connection with the Ukraine war.

Oleg Orlov currently serves as Co-Chairman of the recently established Memorial Human Rights Center. He has authored and co-authored numerous reports and books and resides in Moscow.

Alexander Cherkasov,

Alexander Cherkasov, born in 1966, is an engineer-physicist by training. Since 1989, he has been actively involved with the Memorial Society and has collaborated in various historical research programs. He has notably worked in conflict regions across the post-Soviet space, focusing on issues such as enforced disappearances, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and impunity.

Alexander Cherkasov is recognized as the author of numerous reports and books and has a background in journalism. From 2012 to 2022, he served as the Chairman of the Council of the Memorial Human Rights Center, which was later dissolved by the Russian authorities.

Introduction

For more than two decades, a brutal system of enforced disappearances created by the Russian state has been operating in the Chechen Republic (Russia). Many thousands of people have fallen victim, and disappeared without a trace. As a result, Russia is a leading European country in the number of enforced disappearances in the 21st century. This system has undergone changes, but its integral attributes remain illegal prisons, ill-treatment of the abducted or illegally detained, torture, and extra-judicial executions. Various government departments and authorities of Russia are involved in the activities of this system, both directly and by way of obstructing the investigation of these crimes.

International organizations and institutions, including the OSCE, have repeatedly pointed out the inadmissibility of this practice of enforced disappearances in the North Caucasus, primarily in Chechnya. At first glance, it cannot be said that the Russian authorities have always completely ignored this criticism. Moreover, in 2006-2008 there was a noticeable decrease in the number of enforced disappearances in Chechnya (another proof of the controlled nature of this process; the same was clearly proven by the short-term cessation of enforced disappearances on the eve of "elections" and "referendums" in Chechnya in 2003-2005). However, that decrease turned out to be a tactical maneuver in the struggle between the power structures during the formation of Ramzan Kadyrov's personal power regime. As a result, the system of enforced disappearances was transformed, and since 2009 the number of such crimes has increased again.

In the following years, the Russian authorities completely ignored the appeals (demands, recommendations, etc.) of international organizations regarding the appalling human rights situation in Chechnya, including the practice of enforced disappearances.

At the moment, this system functions unhindered as the most important mechanism of terrorizing the population in order to completely suppress any possibility of forming an opposition to the Kadyrov regime, any behavior disapproved by the authorities, and even any dissent.

We offer the OSCE, other international institutions, as well as OSCE participating states, recommendations on possible steps they should take, in the hope that they can contribute to the fight against the system of enforced disappearances in Chechnya (Russia).

Enforced Disappearances in Chechnya

Human rights organizations have documented reliable evidence that even during the First Chechen War (1994-1996), many people detained by the military or employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation then disappeared.ⁱ However, the practice of enforced disappearances on the territory of the Chechen Republic (CR) became systematic and widespread at the beginning of the Second Chechen War (since the spring of 2000; see Appendix 1). It was systematically organized and coordinated by representatives of various state law enforcement agencies.ⁱⁱ These acts classify as crimes against humanity that have no statute of limitations.

This system was inextricably linked to a network of numerous semi-legal and illegal detention facilities, which existed both officially and secretly, and were under the jurisdiction of various departments (the Ministry of Defense, the FSB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs). People detained during the "sweeps" of settlements, at roadblocks, or taken away from home at night during the "targeted special operation", would be placed in a detention center from this network. There was a well-established conveyor of illegal detentions, secret prisons, tortures, extrajudicial executions, and hiding the bodies of the dead.ⁱⁱⁱ Some of those who temporarily disappeared after being detained were later released (often for ransom), or were transferred to legal temporary detention centers and pre-trial detention centers to formalize their official detention and initiate criminal proceedings against them. But a significant part (the majority in 2000-2003) of those who temporarily disappeared after detention, then disappeared without a trace. Sometimes their bodies were later found with signs of torture and violent death.

The immediate task of this criminal system was to identify, isolate, and destroy members of illegal armed formations and their accomplices. However, it is quite obvious that the same system solved broader tasks – it was used to create a network of informants from among the local population, and to terrorize, suppress, and intimidate all people disloyal to the authorities established in Chechnya.

Even if we are talking only about those who disappeared without a trace, the Memorial Human Rights Center^{iv} has carefully documented more than 1,650 episodes of enforced disappearances during the period of the "counter-terrorist operation" (CTO) in the Chechen Republic in 1999-2009. (one episode often involved the disappearance of several people without a trace).^v

In almost all of these cases, Memorial entered into correspondence with the prosecutor's office. More than 2,000 criminal cases were initiated based on that evidence, but the vast majority of those cases were suspended "*due to the failure to identify the person to be brought as an accused*" (for more information on the practices of impunity, see Appendix 1, paragraph 15).

The Memorial Human Rights Center documented the disappearance of more than 1,250 people without a trace in the period 1999-2001. (subsequently, the bodies of some of them were discovered).^{vi} Then, at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, Memorial was able to cover a limited part of the republic with monitoring, from a quarter to a third, but even in the areas covered, documentation was hardly exhaustive. Subsequently, the territorial coverage of monitoring expanded, but in the conditions of terror, people in most cases refused to talk to researchers, which increased the latency of disappearances. In

2002-2009, the federal forces switched from large-scale "sweeps" to the practice of "targeted measures", and then to the tactics of "Chechenization" of the conflict, that is, relying on Chechens loyal to the Russian government to maintain order in the republic to Moscow. The Memorial Human Rights Center collected information about the abduction by state representatives and the subsequent disappearance of 1976 residents of the Chechen Republic, for each of whom there is more or less detailed information. Some of those people were subsequently released, ransomed, or legalized in IVS and pre-trial detention centers.

Based on the extrapolation of these data and analysis of official reports, Memorial can claim that within just ten years of the "counter-terrorist operation" in Chechnya, between 3000-5000 people disappeared without a trace as a result of kidnappings, illegal arrests, and detentions (later the bodies of some of them were found). It is impossible to name more precise figures.

The Committee of Ministers (CM) of the Council of Europe (CoE), in its decision^{vii} in September 2021, estimated the total number of missing persons during counter-terrorism operations to be between 5,000 and 7,700 people,^{viii} but these figures relate to the broader geographical and temporal context of the last thirty years in the North Caucasus.

In 2000-2004, federal law enforcement agencies were responsible for the commission of enforced disappearances: military personnel of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, and Interior Ministry employees sent to Chechnya from other regions of Russia. Therefore, the traces of the disappeared person were most often lost in the locations of the units and divisions of these departments: it was there where illegal prisons were located. Illegal violence was widespread and indiscriminate, including illegal detentions, abductions, and enforced disappearances.

Hence, burials (mass or of several bodies) of abducted people were usually found in or near the territories of the former locations of military units.

The most famous of them was discovered in February 2001 in the former dacha village "Zdorovye" in the immediate vicinity of Khankala, the main Russian military base in Chechnya.^{ix} It was not a burial, but a dump of corpses. According to official data, the bodies of 51 people were found here and later replaced. According to unofficial data, there were several times more bodies, but the military prevented the work of employees of the Ministry of Emergency Situations and then transported most of the bodies to an unknown location.

All those found in the village of "Zdorovye" were victims of extrajudicial executions: most had their throats cut, their hands tied, and a bullet wound to their heads. 26 bodies were identified by relatives. All of them had previously been detained in front of witnesses by representatives of the federal forces at different times and in different places: at checkpoints, during "sweeps", etc., and then disappeared.^x

After the discovery of this mass grave, a criminal case was initiated, but soon the main version of the investigation became the most ridiculous: the mass burial in a protected area near the Russian military

base was allegedly organized by militants.^{xi} The perpetrators of none of these kidnappings and murders have been found.

The ECHR considered the complaints of the relatives of three women whose bodies were found in this dump of corpses, and ruled that Russia violated Articles 2, 3, 5, and 13 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.^{xii}

The discovery of one such place for storing the corpses of murdered people irrefutably proves the existence of a criminal system of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, in which the military personnel of the Ministry of Defense, the MVD, FSB officers, and other law enforcement agencies were involved. At about the same time, there was another dump of corpses in the gardens of the state farm named after Michurin near n.p.Urus-Martan (where the bodies of disappeared people were regularly found); burials were also found at the location of the 138th separate motorized rifle brigade near the village of Starye Atagi, as well as near the checkpoint "South" near the village of Duba-Yurt, in Argun. Subsequently, many new burials and landfills of bodies were discovered, including on the territory of the military base in Khankala, near the village of Zdorovye, and in the Chernorechensk forest.

In 2002-2006, Russian public opinion and the international community paid considerable attention to the practice of mass-enforced disappearances in Chechnya. Responsibility for this was rightly assigned to the federal law enforcement agencies and the authorities of the Russian Federation. The policy of "Chechenization" of the conflict, carried out by the leadership of the Russian Federation since 2003, was designed, in particular, to reduce this criticism.

In Chechnya, pro-Moscow armed formations and authorities consisting of ethnic Chechens were created. They were gradually granted the functions of opposing armed supporters of Chechen independence and delegated the right to illegal violence.^{xiii}

This policy seemed to be extremely successful for the Russian leadership: Chechens are killing Chechens, while the federal forces and the Russian leadership are relieved of responsibility for everything that happens in Chechnya. The plan was partially successful.

During "Chechenization", there was a change in the course of actions of security forces in relation to the local population. The power structures, consisting of ethnic Chechens, acted more selectively. Mass "sweeps" had been practically stopped. The proportion of abducted people who disappeared without a trace or were killed^{xiv} decreased remarkably. The illegally detained and abducted were taken to secret prisons in the locations of Chechen pro-federal law enforcement agencies, which after 2008 were controlled exclusively by Kadyrov. In 2007-2008, the number of abductions of people by representatives of the state sharply decreased, but this turned out to be a tactical device during the formation of Ramzan Kadyrov's regime.^{xv} Having announced a "stop order" for abductions by the security forces under his control, Kadyrov attacked other structures created and strengthened during the "Chechenization", controlled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian

Federation, who also practiced kidnappings, detention in secret prisons, torture, and disappearances. The result was the dissolution of these structures or their transition to Kadyrov's control.^{xvi}

Since 2009, the regime in Chechnya can be considered fully shaped. The completion of the "counterterrorist operation" was announced, and a Temporary operational grouping of departments and divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, the federal ministry responsible for conducting the CTO, was withdrawn from the republic to Dagestan. All the structures that were now delegated to carry out the CTO, primarily illegal violence, were controlled by Ramzan Kadyrov.^{xvii} The "stop orders" for kidnappings were obviously canceled: abductions of people by security forces have sharply increased again. One of the victims of such kidnappings and murders was Natalia Estemirova, an employee of Memorial, who worked primarily on the topic of enforced disappearances for many years.^{xviii} Therefore, the relatives of the abducted turned to human rights defenders less often, and our information about the disappeared became increasingly incomplete.

Since 2009 to the present moment, the tactics of "selective disappearances" established at that time have been preserved. It turned out that the disappearances (murders) of the majority of the abducted were not necessary to achieve the desired goals. The security forces, as a rule, received all the necessary information, or "confessions," from them in the course of several days or weeks of torture and beatings. This was usually accompanied by threats to the relatives of the abducted, sometimes the relatives got abducted as well. As a result, the latter most often wouldn't file any complaints.^{xix}

During this period in Chechnya, more than half of the total number of detainees on suspicion of various crimes (not necessarily in support of the armed underground) "disappear" for a time (from several days to months). The detaining representatives of the state do not introduce themselves, do not show any documents, and their cars often do not have license plates. Since neither the detainee nor his family is informed which agency made the arrest and where exactly the detainee was taken to, they are "disappeared" from their relatives. People taken away are often kept either in the basements of district police departments (without any registration) or in illegal prisons, without any connection with the outside world, therefore it is more appropriate to use the term "abduction" than "detention". At the same time, all the agencies that the relatives of the illegally detained (abducted) person deny involvement.

Employees of Kadyrov's law enforcement agencies use the period of a person's "disappearance" to torture and threaten them to testify against themselves or others. Then, in a few days, weeks, or months, the abducted may either be legalized and registered as officially detained (often with weapons, ammunition, or drugs planted), or released without registration. Some disappear without a trace (this means either death by torture or extrajudicial execution). Every year hundreds of people disappear for a period of time in Chechnya, but only a minority disappear forever.

Kadyrov's Chechnya currently has a system of illegal secret prisons, where people are kept for weeks, months, and in rare cases for even more than a year. These people are humiliated, tortured, and sometimes secretly executed. As a rule, such prisons are situated in the locations of elite units and

divisions of "Kadyrovites" (formally included in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or Rosgvardiya). Here is the list of some of them: The mobile Special Purpose Detachment (OMON) "Akhmat-Grozny," the Special Rapid Response Detachment "Akhmat" (formerly "Terek,") the Special separate battalion of the patrol and guard service "Grozny," the Police Regiment for the protection of oil and gas facilities (informally known as the "Oil Regiment.") Note: according to the norms of Russian legislation, employees of such law enforcement agencies do not have the right to conduct an inquiry or investigation, and moreover, places of detention of detainees or arrested persons cannot be under their jurisdiction.

The most famous was the "secret prison" in the place of permanent deployment of the Special Purpose Police Regiment named after Hero of Russia A. Kadyrov (PPSP-2, formerly the patrol and post police service regiment No. 2) near the center of Grozny, next to the republican directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

There are testimonies and descriptions of this prison both in the stories of former prisoners^{xx} and in the published^{xxi} testimony of a former PPSP-2 fighter, Suleiman Gezmakhmayev, who is a witness to abductions, torture, and summary executions. He also described how people got into this prison. The soldiers of this regiment went to detentions with insignia of other divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or Rosgvardiya, thereby hiding who detained (in fact kidnapped) a person who was taken to the location of the regiment, where they disappeared, for some time or forever.

Several years of work by human rights organizations (Memorial Human Rights Center, the Committee against Torture (CPT), the LGBT Network, the Legal Initiative for Russia, and Novaya Gazeta have made it possible to fully, and in detail, document one of the episodes of detention in this prison of people abducted in 2016-2017.^{xxii} It is highly likely that 27 men who disappeared without a trace at that time were brutally murdered^{xxiii} in a secret prison in the basement of one of the barracks of the regiment. 15 other temporarily "disappeared" men were kept together with them in the basement for a month. Everyone, without exception, was brutally tortured. Later, these 15 people were handed over to police departments, where they were officially detained (allegedly, weapons were found with them) and "sincere confessions" of participation in the armed underground group.^{xxiv}

Human rights activists and Novaya Gazeta handed over to the investigating authorities irrefutable evidence of the detention of disappeared people in an illegal prison. The investigators sabotaged the verification of these crime reports, and repeatedly refused to initiate criminal cases on the facts of abductions, illegal imprisonment, the disappearance of detainees without a trace, and torture.^{xxv} The courts recognized such refusals of investigators as legitimate. We emphasize that the inspection was carried out by the investigative bodies at the federal, not republican, level, and the complaints were considered by the courts not in the Chechen Republic, but outside it.^{xxvi} Thus, the practice of enforced disappearances in the Chechen Republic receives patronage and assistance at the federal level, and federal structures are in fact complicit in these crimes.

December 14, 2021, The ECHR issued a ruling on the complaint of relatives of several people from among the 27 disappeared (executed) on the territory of the PPSP-2.^{xxvii}

Which of the prisoners of the secret prisons disappeared without a trace - that is, which of them were killed?

Firstly, those who are suspected of active participation in the armed underground groups, as was the case with 27 people executed in PPSP-2.

Secondly, they are critics of the Kadyrov regime, like Salman Tepsurkaev, an 18-year-old moderator of the opposition Telegram channel 1ADAT.^{xxviii} He was abducted by Chechen security forces on September 5, 2020, from the Krasnodar Region of Russia. On September 7, a video appeared on the Internet showing naked Tepsurkaev berating himself and 1ADAT, and then torturing himself. The location of the last place where his phone was turned on is the territory of the PPSP—2 in Grozny: obviously, the "Kadyrovites," having received the password from the phone, established Tepsurkaev's connections. Despite the wide public outcry, the fate of Tepsurkaev was unknown for a long time. It was only in August 2022, when the lawyer of the checkpoint representing Adam's interests told reporters that he was killed^{xxix} in Chechnya.

Thirdly, these are some of those "caught" being engaged in homosexual relations. One of the examples is the disappearance without trace of the famous Chechen singer Zelimkhan Bakayev.^{xxx}

In 2022, abductions of people by security forces continued in Chechnya, followed by their disappearance: according to the telegram channel 1ADAT, 952 people were abducted that year, the absolute majority of whom were then released or handed over to the police for further registration of legal detention.^{xxxi} We cannot confirm the accuracy of that figure, but it may well correspond to reality. We have verified information about individual cases of kidnappings in 2022 (see Appendix 2).

By the end of 2022. The ECHR has issued 320 decisions in which it found Russia responsible for violations of the right to life during military and counter-terrorism operations in the North Caucasus (mainly in Chechnya). The number of applicants in these cases is significantly higher since many decisions combine complaints from several applicants. These decisions describe 668 cases of abductions with subsequent disappearance of people committed by representatives of the State: 612 people were abducted and disappeared from 1999-2006, and 56 people from 2006 to 2017. The ECHR recognized that the Russian authorities are responsible for those crimes and for not investigating those violations. The Council of Europe has ruled that Russia has not complied with those decisions of the ECHR because it has not yet conducted an effective investigation into any of the crimes.^{xxxii}

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has repeatedly appointed special rapporteurs on the human rights situation in Chechnya, listened to their reports, and adopted a number of resolutions and recommendations^{xxxiii} concerning human rights violations in the CR and other regions

of the North Caucasus. In these serious documents, much attention was paid to the thriving atmosphere of impunity in Chechnya and the criminal practice of enforced disappearances.^{xxxiv} The recommendations included proposals for practical steps that, if there was goodwill on the part of the Russian authorities, could radically change the situation for the better. But there was no such goodwill, and the atmosphere of impunity in Chechnya is still flourishing.

It cannot be argued that the pressure of the international community and Russian society on the authorities of the Russian Federation did not have positive consequences. The decrease in the number of abductions in Chechnya in 2007-2008 was a specific reaction to such pressure (see above): The system of enforced disappearances has been transformed, and since 2009 the number of such crimes has increased again.

In its Recommendation 1600 (2003),^{xxxv} PACE recommended the Council of Europe: *"If efforts are not intensified to bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations, and the situation of impunity persists in Chechnya, consider inviting the international community to establish a special international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Chechen Republic."*

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the situation of impunity clearly persisted in Chechnya, PACE has never returned to consideration of this issue.

Since 2011, the Council of Europe has addressed the situation with the execution of ECHR decisions on complaints 20 times, mainly about enforced disappearances in the North Caucasus, primarily in Chechnya (the group of cases "Khashiev and Akayeva")^{xxxvi} In its decisions and resolutions of the Council of Europe:

- stressed the continuing suffering of relatives of missing persons who still do not know anything about the fate of their family members;
- called on the Russian authorities to promptly take the necessary measures to intensify the search for missing persons and the investigation of criminal cases;
- (sometimes "took notes" with interest) the information provided by the Russian side on the measures taken to improve the effectiveness of investigations and search for missing persons;
- expressed regret (sometimes "deep") that the measures taken did not bring any results in determining the fate of the missing relatives of the applicants.

And so it went year after year.

Time after time, the Council of Europe has called on the Russian authorities to take measures to create a single high-level body authorized to search for missing persons as a result of the "counter-terrorist operation" in the North Caucasus, but Russia has not reacted, in fact ignoring these resolutions, decisions, and recommendations.

All these years, the Council of Europe has pretended to be trying to influence Russia but did not try to address the aforementioned PACE Recommendation 1600 on the establishment of a special international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Chechen Republic.

On November 1, 2018, 16 OSCE participating states initiated the application of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism in relation to the Russian Federation on the human rights situation in Chechnya. The Russian Government refused to appoint a Russian co-rapporteur and to assist the fact-finding mission inside the country. On December 20, 2018, a report prepared within the framework of the Moscow Mechanism "On alleged human rights violations and impunity in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation" was published.^{xxxvii} The report contained an accurate and detailed description of the extremely difficult human rights situation in the Chechen Republic. In particular, one of the sections of the report was devoted to the topic of "arbitrary and illegal detentions and imprisonment, persecution and torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions." The report gave recommendations, specifically aimed at ending the practice of enforced disappearances and eradicating the atmosphere of impunity.

In September 2019, at a press conference during the Meeting on the Implementation of OSCE Commitments in the Field of Human Dimension in Warsaw, the author of the report, Professor Wolfgang Benedek, and human rights activist from Memorial, Oleg Orlov, stated that none of the recommendations of the report were implemented by the authorities of the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federation. In particular, none of the cases of enforced disappearances described in the report has been investigated.

Recommendations

The OSCE needs to work out concrete steps for the OSCE participating states to fulfill the obligations set out in OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/20 "Prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

As part of this work, the OSCE needs to develop concrete action plans in 2023 to eliminate the practice of enforced disappearances in the OSCE region.

OSCE institutions and executive bodies should demand that the Russian Government immediately stop the practice of enforced disappearances in Chechnya. This demand should be expressed in the form of public condemnation of the Russian government with the support of the OSCE participating states.

The OSCE Chairmanship should include the fight against enforced disappearances in its priorities.

The OSCE Chairmen should establish a position and appoint a Special Representative on Enforced Disappearances, whose mandate should be renewed annually and include collecting information on cases of enforced disappearances and assistance to victims of this criminal practice in the OSCE region, developing tools for cooperation between participating states and civil society on these issues.

The fight against enforced disappearances should be included in the regular agenda of OSCE activities on the human dimension.

OSCE participating states should consistently raise the issue of the need to eliminate the practice of enforced disappearances at OSCE events and other international forums, as well as at bilateral meetings with representatives of the states, and issue joint statements or declarations on this issue at the level of the Council of Ministers.

The OSCE/ODIHR should establish a group of experts on enforced disappearances to monitor the states' compliance with relevant obligations, make recommendations to participating states and advise the ODIHR on its relevant programmes. Interested states should contribute funds to the ODIHR for this work.

OSCE participating states should hold consultations to consider the establishment by the international community of a special international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Chechen Republic.

Considering that of all the regular budget resources allocated to the three main areas of UN activities, human rights receive only about 4 percent, and almost two-thirds of UN human rights revenues come from voluntary contributions from UN Member States and other donors, OSCE participating states are encouraged to increase the funding allocated for these purposes, especially for the UN Petitions and Urgent Action Group to give it the necessary resources to deal with the growing number of complaints so that the UN Treaty bodies can consider cases, including those in which the issue of enforced disappearances is raised in a timely manner.

Conclusions

For more than twenty years, international organizations and institutions designed to protect human rights have tried and failed to get Russia to fulfill its obligations, to completely stop the organized practice of enforced disappearances, to investigate abductions and murders committed by representatives of state structures, and to liquidate illegal prisons on the territory of Chechnya. Now Russia is actively using the experience gained by its security forces in Chechnya to create a similar system of enforced disappearances and secret prisons in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

Attempts over the years to conduct a "constructive dialogue" with a malicious violator of international human rights treaties have only led to the degradation of international mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

All this demonstrates the urgent need for an early radical reform of the international human rights protection system and its institutions.

Endnotes

ⁱ "Russia-Chechnya: a Chain of Mistakes and Crimes. 1994-1996". Moscow: Memorial Society, 2010, Second edition.

https://memohrc.org/sites/all/themes/memo/templates/pdf.php?pdf=/sites/default/files/rossia-chechnia_2edition.pdf

ⁱⁱ A.V. Cherkasov, "The Fate is Unknown." Residents of the Chechen Republic who were detained by representatives of federal law enforcement agencies during the armed conflict and disappeared or killed without a trace. October 1999 – 2000. M., Human Rights Center "Memorial" - Publishing House "Links", 2012. <https://memohrc.org/ru/books/sudba-neizvestna-zhiteli-chechenskoy-respubliki-zaderzhannye-predstavitelyami-federalnyh>;

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Chechnya, 2004. Abductions and disappearances. Report of the "Memorial" Human Rights Center. 07.02.2005. <https://memohrc.org/ru/reports/chechnya-2004-god-pohishcheniya-i-ischeznoveniya-lyudey>.

^{iv} In February 2022, it was liquidated by the decision of the Russian authorities. Supporters and former members of the liquidated Memorial Human Rights Center established the Memorial Human Rights Protection Center in 2022.

^v This also includes those cases when the body of the "disappeared" person was later discovered.

^{vi} A.V. Cherkasov, "The Fate is Unknown."
– "People live here." Chechnya: A chronicle of violence. Part 1. July-December 2000 Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center - Publishing House "Links". 2003.

<https://memohrc.org/sites/all/themes/memo/templates/pdf.php?pdf=/sites/default/files/old/files/156.pdf>

– "People live here." Chechnya: A chronicle of violence. Part 2/3. January-June 2001 Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center - Publishing House "Links". 2006.

<http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/chechen/jzl20/index.htm>

– "People live here." Chechnya: A chronicle of violence. Part 4. July-September 2001 Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center - Publishing House "Links". 2008.

<http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/chechen/jzl40/index.htm>

– "People live here." Chechnya: A chronicle of violence. Part 5. October - December 2001 Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center - Publishing House "Links". 2010.

<https://memohrc.org/sites/all/themes/memo/templates/pdf.php?pdf=/sites/default/files/old/files/357.pdf>

^{vii} 1411th meeting, 14-16 September 2021 (DH) H46-31 Khashiyev and Akayeva group v. Russian Federation (Application No. [57942/00](#)). Supervision of the execution of the European Court's judgments. Reference document [CM/Notes/1411/H46-31](#).

^{viii} [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#{%22EXECLIdentifier%22:\[%22004-9%22\]}](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#{%22EXECLIdentifier%22:[%22004-9%22]}); these figures are an obvious compromise between the estimates of Memorial given here and repeatedly published earlier (from 3 to 5 thousand people), and the lists published on the website of the Center for Civil Assistance in the Search for Missing Persons in the North Caucasus at the General Lebed Peacekeeping Mission (http://www.rozysk.org/people/db_info), which also includes information about other categories of disappeared since 1991: disappeared in the First Chechen War of 1994-1996, both civilians and Russian military personnel and law enforcement officers; disappeared in the interwar period (late 1996 – mid-1999); disappeared from other regions of the North Caucasus. Information from this database Memorial used in its work on Enforced Disappearances.

^{ix} <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/169667>; <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/170946>; <http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/n-caucas/hankala/hankala.htm>; <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/russian/reports/russia/2001/mar/topic41.html>; <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24220248.html>

^x For more information, see: A.V. Cherkasov, "Fate is unknown", pp. 437-444.

^{xi} On August 21, 2001, in an interview to the Interfax News Agency, the Prosecutor of the Chechen Republic, Vladimir Chernov, stated that "there are no witness statements confirming that federal troops are responsible for these murders." The main version of the investigation authorities is that this mass burial was organized by militants.

^{xii} Luluyev and others v. Russia, № 69480/01. The decision was made by the ECHR on November 9, 2006, the court recognized that Russia violated Articles 2, 3, 5, 13 of the Convention.

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-77926>

Gakayev and others v. Russia, No. 56745/08 in the case of Kaykharova and Others v. Russia. The decision was made by the ECHR on August 1, 2013, the court found a violation of Article 2 in the substantive and procedural parts, Articles 3, 5, 13 of the Convention. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-122969>

As it became known from another case considered by the ECHR, Lyanova and Aliyeva V. Russia NN 12713/02 and 28440/03 (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-88667>), BTR No. 110, on which the

women were taken away, belonged to the 3723–8th Brigade of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which from May to August 2000 was part of the "military operational reserve" in Grozny.

^{xiii} The situation in the North Caucasus: November 2006 – May 2007. The apotheosis of "Chechenization". Memorial Human Rights Center. <https://memohrc.org/ru/reports/situaciya-na-severnom-kavkaze-noyabr-2006-may-2007-apofez-chechenizacii>.

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} "Three years of "peace". Bulletins of the Memorial Human Rights Center. Summer 2006 – summer 2009" (Moscow, Publishing House "Human Rights", 2010, 527 p.). Authors-compilers — G. Verny, O. Orlov, A. Cherkasov.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} "Three years of 'stability': bulletins of the Memorial Human Rights Center on the situation in the North Caucasus. Issue 2. Autumn 2009 - autumn 2012". The authors are Oleg Orlov, Alexander Cherkasov and Grigory Verny.

^{xviii} In memory of Natalia Estemirova. Memorial Human Rights Center. <https://memohrc.org/ru/special-projects/pamyati-natali-estemirovoy>

^{xix} "Three years of 'stability': bulletins of the Memorial Human Rights Center on the situation in the North Caucasus. Issue 2. Autumn 2009 - autumn 2012". The authors are Oleg Orlov, Alexander Cherkasov and Grigory Verny.

^{xx} https://memohrc.org/sites/default/files/pokazaniya_abubakarova_1.doc;
https://memohrc.org/sites/default/files/pokazaniya_musaeva_1.doc

^{xxi} I served in the Chechen police and didn't want to kill people. Elena Milashina. Novaya Gazeta. 15.03.2021. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/03/15/ia-sluzhil-v-chechenskoi-politsii-i-ne-khotel-ubivat-liudei-18>

^{xxii} Human Rights in Chechen Republic. O. Orlov's speech in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 28.01.2020. <https://memohrc.org/en/publicationstypes/report/human-rights-chechen-republic-o-orlovs-speech-parliamentary-assembly>;

Human rights in the Chechen Republic. O.P. Orlov's speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 28.01.2020 <https://memohrc.org/ru/reports/prava-cheloveka-v-chechenskoy-respublike-vystuplenie-op-orlova-v-parlamentskoy-assamblee>

Materials of the press conference of Memorial, Novaya Gazeta and KPP. 23.07.2019
https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/novoe-delo-o-pytkah-i-kak-chechenskie-vlasti-obmanuli-rossiyskogo-ombudsmena

^{xxiii} I served in the Chechen police and didn't want to kill people. Elena Milashina. Novaya Gazeta. 15.03.2021. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/03/15/ia-sluzhil-v-chechenskoi-politsii-i-ne-khotel-ubivat-liudei-18>

^{xxiv} All 15 later refused making these "confessions" in court and gave detailed testimony about their abductions, detention in a secret prison, torture, falsification of charges. The court did not consider these testimonies credible and sentenced everyone to long terms of imprisonment.

^{xxv} https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/chechnya-sud-otkazalsya-priznat-nezakonnym-otkaz-vozbudit-ugolovnoe-delo-po-rasstrelnomu; <https://memohrc.org/en/publicationstypes/report/human-rights-chechen-republic-o-orlovs-speech-parliamentary-assembly>

^{xxvi} Ibid.

^{xxvii} A.A. and others v. Russia N37008/19. The ECHR ruled that Russia violated Articles 2.3.5 and 13 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-214031>

Another complaint of a relative of the disappeared people, submitted to the ECHR by lawyers of the Memorial Human Rights Center, was communicated in 2021.

^{xxviii} Tepsurkaev Salman Shirvanievich. Description of the case in document XXX (or in the XXX section of the XXX program on the website of the Memorial Human Rights Center

<https://memohrc.org/ru/defendants/tepsurkaev-salman-shirvanievich>;

Human Rights Watch. Statement by Russian and International Human Rights Organizations on the Case of Salman Tepsurkaev. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/29/statement-russian-and-international-human-rights-organizations-case-salman-0>

Ask the Chechen authorities: What happened to Salman Tepsurkaev? Amnesty International.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/russia-chechnya-salman-tepsurkaev>

^{xxix} Human rights activists reported the death of the missing moderator of the 1ADAT channel. RBC.

<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/24/08/2022/6305b2369a7947662b982d9f>

^{xxx} <https://memohrc.org/ru/news/chechnya-videozapis-zelimhana-bakaeva-skoree-vsego-sfabrikovana-ego-pohititelyami>; <https://memohrc.org/ru/monitorings/ya-sluzhil-v-chechenskoy-policii-i-ne-hotel-ubivat-lyudey-18>; <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/28683769.html>

^{xxxi} <https://t.me/s/IADAT>

^{xxxii}

<https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#%7B%22fulltext%22:%5B%22Khashiyev%22%2C%22EXECIdentifier%22:%5B%22004-9%22%7D>

^{xxxiii} <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17097&lang=en>;
<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17263/html>; <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17265/html>;
<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17266/html>; <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17354/html>;
<https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17870&lang=en>;
<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23675/html>; <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/30165/html>;
<https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=24962&lang=en>

^{xxxiv} From the Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 1403 (2004)

<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17265/html>

PACE "calls on the Government of the Russian Federation to take additional measures to eliminate the atmosphere of impunity in the Chechen Republic:

– vigorously investigate and prosecute all human rights violations, regardless of the identity of the perpetrators;

– Send a clear signal from the highest political level to all employees of security and law enforcement agencies, instructing them to always respect human rights in the performance of their duties; ..."

From the Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 1455 (2005)

<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17354/html>

With regard to the conflict in the Chechen Republic, the Russian authorities should implement the recommendations contained in Resolution 1403 (2004) and, in particular, take effective measures to immediately stop the ongoing "disappearances", torture, arbitrary detentions, incommunicado detention in illegal and secret places of detention, and illegal killings, to bring to justice persons found guilty of human rights violations."

^{xxxv}

[https://www.coe.int/T/r/parliamentary_assembly/\[russian_documents\]/\[2003\]/%5BApril_2003%5D/Recommend1600.asp](https://www.coe.int/T/r/parliamentary_assembly/[russian_documents]/[2003]/%5BApril_2003%5D/Recommend1600.asp)

^{xxxvi} [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#{%22EXECIdentifier%22:\[%22004-9%22\]}](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng#{%22EXECIdentifier%22:[%22004-9%22]})

^{xxxvii} <https://www.osce.org/odihr/407402>

The topic of the report was defined as "accusations of impunity of recorded human rights violations in Chechnya in the period from January 2017 to the end of 2018, directed, in particular, against individuals in connection with their alleged or actual sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as against human rights defenders, lawyers, independent media, civil society organizations and other individuals and organizations. The recorded violations of human rights include: harassment and persecution, arbitrary or unlawful detention or imprisonment, torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions."

Annex 1

A brief overview of the increased practice of enforced disappearances during the “anti-terrorist operation” (ATO) in Chechnya in 1999-2009.

1. Enforced disappearances in the armed conflict zone in the North Caucasus have become one of the most horrific manifestations of the state system, which included:

- forcible abduction or illegal detentions;
- illegal detention in “secret prisons”;
- torture;
- extrajudicial executions;
- concealment of dead bodies.

Abductions or illegal detentions of people followed by their disappearance have been a key component of the so-called “anti-terrorist operation” conducted by the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus since August 1999.

2. These enforced disappearances are so widespread and systematic practice that constitute, according to the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances, crimes against humanity with all the ensuing international repercussions: these crimes are not subject to statutes of limitations. The total number of victims of enforced disappearances committed in the armed conflict zone in Chechnya since 1999 is reportedly estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000.

3. This system took shape during the first months of the second Chechen War. The authorities did not term what was happening as a war or as an armed conflict, and they did not announce a state of emergency or martial law. They introduced a “counter-terrorist operation” regime, which made it possible for them to use all possible force ministries “not for their intended purposes” without any legal procedures or parliamentary oversight. No other control in the “anti-terrorist operation” zone was envisaged either. The legislation in force implied that the “anti-terrorist operation” was of a local, short-term nature, but in reality, it lasted almost ten years in an area of more than 10,000 sq. km.

4. We cannot assert that the creation and functioning of this system were initially intended in this particular form. As far as we can judge, it was originally supposed to investigate a criminal case under the code name *War* and to hold a show trial. But the very idea of investigating the armed conflict events within the law of peacetime was absurd. Many hundreds of participants of the armed conflict, detained from autumn 1999 to spring 2000, were interrogated on this case (as a rule, through the use of torture and other unlawful means), placed in remand facilities, and were eventually released under an amnesty (and/or as a result of corruption).

5. At the same time, the groupings of troops operating in Chechnya (which included FSB operational groups, Interior Ministry divisions, and FPS units), used from the start and then increasingly expanded

the practice of absolutely illegal holding in custody outside of any legal framework, their “forced interrogations”, which did not imply that a person would survive and stand trial.

6. Since at least May 2000, this system has become stable. Its center was Khankala (the main Russian military base in Chechnya), important command offices were the headquarters of the *Zapad* (West) grouping of federal forces (near the village of Tangi-Chu), the Urus-Martan temporary department of internal affairs (located in the same compound of official buildings with commandant's office and FSB local department), the Oktyabrsky temporary police station, the *Titanic* (a military base on the pass between villages of Alleroy and Novogroznensky).

7. A major way to conduct the ATO in the first years was a “sweep” operation in settlements. A group of forces (which included army units, internal troops, Interior Ministry divisions, FPS units, and FSB staff), moving from Khankala to villages, blockaded them to carry out an all-out “filtration” of the male population. For this purpose, they set up “temporary filtration facilities” on the outskirts of villages, where they interrogated people using torture. Those suspected of participating in armed resistance were taken to Khankala for interrogation or killed. Some of them were eventually released, but others disappeared without a trace. Furthermore, seemingly pointless torture and interrogation in “temporary filtration facilities” ensured the recruiting of agents and the development of an agent network, as well as communication with already existing agents.

8. The second main way to conduct the ATO was the “targeted special operations”, in which they detained, mostly at night, those suspected of participating in armed resistance or of “aiding”. Detainees (like those detained during “sweeps”) were taken to illegal detention facilities, where they were tortured, seeking information about their comrades: it was a “conveyor belt” system. Bodies of those killed after torture were dumped (the most known body dump site was in the Zdorovye summer community near Khankala).

9. This system proved to be rather counter-productive in the fight against armed resistance. Mass detentions were based on testimonies obtained through torture, or simply arbitrary detentions, “sweep” operations, and “targeted special operations” accompanied by plunder and resident’s property destruction - all this brutal excessive, and indiscriminate violence did not reduce but rather increased the mobilization base of armed underground. This became clear at the end of 2002, after the Nord-Ost terrorist attack in Moscow. Apparently, in months that followed, federal authorities drew conclusions and proceeded to “chechenization” of conflict.

10. As part of “chechenization” in 2003, the armed formations of ethnic Chechens were organized and given new powers:

- GRU special battalions *Zapad* (West) led by Said-Magomed Kakiev (opposed Dzhokhar Dudayev since the early 1990s) and *Vostok* (East) led by the Yamadayev brothers (defected to the federal center side in 1999);
- FSB special group *Gorets* (Highlander) led by Movladi Baisarov (in the later 1990s - a well-known kidnapper);

- “Akhmad Kadarov's security service” led by his son Ramzan Kadyrov. Former militants were taken in by all possible methods, including torture and violence, and later complicity in torture, violence, and murders.

In addition, there was the operational investigation bureau No. 2 (ORB-2) of the Main Department of the Interior Ministry of the Russian Federation for the North Caucasian federal district, staffed by personnel officers of the Interior Ministry.

These structures were gradually given the authority to commit illegal violence as part of the ATO, including enforced disappearances.

11. The main goal of “chechenization” was to increase the targeting and selectivity of actions, and to reduce “collateral damage”. All this was expected to improve the effectiveness of methods used (in fact, terrorist ones).

Additionally, such a configuration was supposed to provide mutual control over activities of various structures (for example, in 2006-2007, two cases against “kadyrovtsy” (Chechen armed men under command of Ramzan Kadyrov) were investigated).

12. Dynamics of the number of abductions and disappearances documented by the HRC Memorial in 2002-2009 shows that “chechenization” of the conflict was at first effective. The data, even though incomplete, of this monitoring done according to a single method, make it possible to assess these trends. Up until 2008, we have observed a systematic decrease in the number of recorded abductions, and in the proportion of those who were killed or who had disappeared without a trace:

Year	Abducted, total	Of them released or bought out	Of them found killed	Of them disappeared	Of them found in remand facilities
2002	544	91	81	372	-
2003	498	158	52	288	-
2004	450	213	26	203	8
2005	323	155	25	128	15
2006	187	94	11	63	19
2007	35	21	1	9	2
2008	42	21	4	12	5
2009	93	60	10	19	4

We assume that this decrease was definitely due to the “chechenization” of the conflict.

13. In 2006-2008, Ramzan Kadyrov was able to consistently achieve the liquidation of the *Gorets* special group, the loyalty of ORB-2, and the dissolution of the *Zapad* and *Vostok* battalions. This was

accompanied by propaganda campaigns to accuse these units of human rights violations, abductions, torture, and killings. As a result, in January 2007, “Kadyrov’s” structures received a stop order and practically ceased abductions.

14. When Ramzan Kadyrov solved his tasks and became the uncontrollable and unchallenged leader of Chechnya, he rescinded his stop order and resumed abductions, and enforced disappearances on a regular basis.

15. For total enforced disappearances (between 3,000 and 5,000 people), the Russian courts convicted two federal “siloviki” (the so-called security forces, known in Russia as *siloviki*) and two “kadyrovtsy” (any armed, ethnically-Chechen men under the control of Kadyrov): “the case of ATC officers” and “the case of PPS officers”, i.e. 99.9 percent impunity for such crimes. A study of enforced disappearance cases shows that various methods were systematically used for this:

- criminal cases were not initiated – sometimes this was done only after filing a complaint with the ECHR;

- there was no investigation on the merits – the case, as prescribed by the Code of Criminal Procedure, was suspended and resumed, but not terminated, thus making it impossible for relatives to get acquainted with it;

- if nevertheless, there were some indisputable evidence of involvement of the military or FSB officers in the disappearance, and the case was sent to the military prosecutor's office, then the latter groundlessly refused to accept it for proceedings, and the endless “ping-pong” between civil and military justice began;

- If the military prosecutor's office took over the case, then, first, they would repeatedly allow the suspects to leave Chechnya, where they were on assignment, for their permanent bases, and only then would they begin an unsuccessful search for them; second, in the course of the lengthy investigation, the case would be transformed so that persons who had already been killed or died became accused, while the living suspects were acquitted of the charges.

Overall, there was a system of organized impunity, which ensured the reproduction of enforced disappearances as a widespread and systematic practice.

Under Russian law, the statute of limitations for the gravest crimes is 15 years, allowing thousands of these criminal cases to be dismissed. However, precisely because the enforced disappearances were a widespread and systematic pattern (as proved by an array of hundreds of ECHR rulings on such cases), they constitute a crime against humanity, according to the 2006 Convention on Enforced Disappearances, with all the ensuing international repercussions, including no statute of limitations.

Annex 2

INFORMATION ON ABDUCTIONS AND DISAPPEARANCES IN CHECHNYA FROM 2006 TO 2022 IN THE BULLETINS OF HRC MEMORIAL

For over fifteen years (from Summer 2006 through Winter 2021/22) Memorial issued its analytical bulletin “The situation in the conflict zone in the North Caucasus: assessment of human rights defenders”. Practically every issue of the bulletin contained information on illegal detentions, abductions, and enforced disappearances in Chechnya. The table below provides links to these issues, with brief annotations.

Summer 2006	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-25	The chapter on abductions in the Chechen Republic (CR).
Autumn 2006	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-24	The chapter on abductions in the CR.
Winter 2006 – 2007	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-23	Abductions.
Spring 2007	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-22	The chapter on ceasing abductions, but still a few cases
Summer 2007	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-21	Chapter “Abductions in the CR continue”.
Autumn 2007	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-20	Chapter “Adductions, torture, secret prisons in the CR”.
Winter 2007 – 2008	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-19	Subchapter on abductions in Chechnya.
Summer 2008	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-17	Chapter “People in the CR are again abducted”.
Winter 2008 – 2009	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-15	Chapter on abductions in the CR.

Spring 2009	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-14	Chapter on abductions in the CR.
Summer 2009	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-13	Chapter “New abductions in the CR”.
Autumn 2010	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-42	Chapter “Violations of human rights in the CR”, reports on abductions and detentions.
Winter 2011 – 2012	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-zima-2011-2012gg	Chapter “Light and Shadows of Modern Chechnya”.
Autumn 2014	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavka-0	Chapter “Illegal detentions and abductions” in the North Caucasus.
Spring 2015	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-35	Chapter “Blast at Grozny dam and repressions by security men.
Autumn 2015	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-33	Chapter “Kadyrov’s “prophylactic measures”. Several episodes of abductions.
Spring 2016	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-26	Abductions of a bard and two “publicists”
Winter 2016 – 2017	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-32	Detentions and abductions of relatives of militants, incl. on the future “case of 27”.
Spring 2017	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavk-31	Abductions of gays (“over 100” detainees/abducted).
Winter 2017 – 2018	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-zima-20172018-gg	1. Abductions of 8 people in Grozny. 2. Continuation of the campaign against homosexuals. The disappearance of Zelimkhan Bakaev.

Summer 2018	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-let-2018-g	Detentions of 150-200 relatives of those who attacked security forces in the Shali district.
Winter 2019 – 2020	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-zima	Episodes of abductions/ disappearances (8 people in total).
Autumn 2020	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-osen-2020-goda	Detention of Salman Tepsurkaev.
Winter 2020 – 2021	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-zima-2020-2021-godov	Detention of relatives of the Temurziev brothers who attacked policemen.
Spring 2021	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-vooruzhyonnogo-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-vesnoy-2021-goda	On the capture of relatives of Suleiman Gezmakhmaev by security forces to put pressure on him (PPS-2, “Case of 27”).
Summer 2021	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-vooruzhyonnogo-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-letom-2021-goda	Abduction of Khalimat Taramova
Autumn 2021	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-vooruzhyonnogo-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-osenyu-2021-goda	Abduction of relatives of Akhmet Zakaev; abduction of 14 people in Gudermes.
Winter 2021 – 2022	https://memohrc.org/ru/bulletins/byulleten-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-zima-2021-2022-godov	1. Abductions of relatives of Chechen opposition emigrants. 2. Abduction of Zarema Musaeva. 3. Trial of Magomadov and Isaev (abducted in February 2021).

Annex 3

Abductions in the Chechen Republic:

December 2021 – January 2023

(this is not an exhaustive list of abductions, but only those whose circumstances were verified by HRC Memorial.)

1. DECEMBER 2021: DETENTION OF RELATIVES OF OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS AND BLOGGERS

(pp. 1-2)

2. ABDUCTION CASES IN CHECHNYA IN 2022 AND JANUARY 2023 (pp. 3-6)

1. DECEMBER 2021: DETENTION OF RELATIVES OF OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS AND BLOGGERS

In late 2021, a number of political figures in opposition to the Ramazan Kadyrov regime and living outside Russia – **Tumso Abdurakhmanov, Mansur Sadulaev, Minkail Malizaev, Khamzat Khalitov, Aslan Artsuev** and the lawyer of the Committee against Torture, **Abubakar Yangulbaev** – reported abductions of their relatives and threats received in connection with these abductions.

On the night of December 22, the nine relatives of **Tumso Abdurakhmanov** were abducted: his cousins **Movldy, Musa,** and **Movsar Abdurakhmanov,** maternal uncles **Salambek** and **Muslim Khasarov,** cousin **Tahmin Abdurakhmanov,** great nephew **Deni Abdurakhmanov,** second cousin **Mohmad Abdurakhmanov** and maternal cousin **Mokhmad Tsukaev** (he was beaten when abducted). Later, Tumso Abdurakhmanov received a message whose author promised to send photos of his relatives “*in a near-death state*”, with a postscript: “*As for your cousin Takhmina, we will have special fun with her.*” The author of the message demanded that the blogger record a video with an apology to Kadyrov. Christo Grozev, a member of the Bellingcat investigative team, has established that the phone number from which the message was sent belongs to a SOBR special forces officer stationed in Chechnya and formally part of the National Guard, but in fact, completely controlled by Ramzan Kadyrov.

On December 23 and 24, six of the abducted men were released, and Salambek Khasarov, Takhmina, and Deni Abdurakhmanov remained in custody. However, on the morning of December 24, **Ravza Osmanovna Shaidova** and **Asiyat Gasanovna Aibazova,** the mother and sister of Abdurakhmanov's wife, were abducted in the Russian city of *Astrakhan*. According to Tumso, his mother-in-law was forcefully taken away from the house she lived in, and his wife's

sister was summoned to the local police department, where she was put in a car with Chechen license plate and transferred to Chechnya.

On the afternoon of December 22, it became known about the abduction of Mansur Sadulaev's cousins: **Khasan Abdutalipovich Khasanov, Khusein Abdutalipovich Khasanov, and Ibrahim Yusupovich Khasiev.**

On December 22, Minkail Malizaev reported that all his relatives on his father's and mother's side were abducted in Urus-Martan. As claimed by Malizaev, they were tortured and beaten and he was sent photos of his mother and sister naked. On December 24, Minkail Malizaev said all his relatives except his brother and sister were released: he knew nothing about their whereabouts. Unlike other activists, Minkail Malizaev did not give the names of the abducted relatives, and information about their abductions came only from Malizaev himself. Other sources neither confirmed nor denied the information he gave.

On the evening of December 22, in the villages of Achkhoy-Martan and Katar-Yurt of the Achkhoy-Martan district of the Chechen Republic, police officers detained Aslan Artsuev's relatives: **Khizir Abdulmuslimov** and **Selim Aslakhonov**, Artsuev's cousins, his uncle **Sultan Artsuev** and second cousin **Musa Artsuev**. Artsuev stated that the police chief in the Achkhoy-Martan district and FSB officers were involved in the abduction.

Aslan Artsuev noted that he had not communicated with his relatives for a very long time: he saw some of them only in childhood and broke off all relations with the others for security reasons and due to differences in political views.

On December 24, information on the abduction of Khasan Khalitov's relatives was received. In addition to Khasan's father and brothers, who were reportedly captured back in autumn, **Muslim Uzarov, Magomed Uzarov, Abu-Muslim Avdaev, Mokhammad** (Hasan's uncle), and **Adlan** (surname unknown) were also abducted.

An attempt to silence critics of the Kadyrov regime by abducting their relatives failed. Tumso Abdurakhmanov, Khasan Khalitov, and Aslan Artsuev publicly declared that they would not succumb to the pressure and fulfill the demands of the Chechen authorities, despite the threats to relatives. None of the opposition figures stopped their activities.

On January 7, 2022, a number of Russian and international human rights organizations – including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Federation internationale pour les droits humains (FIDH), HRC Memorial, and Civic Assistance – publicly addressed Russian President Vladimir Putin in connection with these abductions. They demanded that the ongoing oppression in Chechnya be stopped, that a prompt, full, and effective investigation be carried out into the human rights violations committed by the Chechen authorities, and that all perpetrators be brought to justice, irrespective of their rank.

By the end of January 2022, according to HRC Memorial, all the abductees were released.

2. ABDUCTION CASES IN CHECHNYA IN 2022 AND IN JANUARY 2023

Throughout 2022, numerous reports of abduction in the Chechen Republic (CR) occurred. However, due to the absence of a representative office of HRC Memorial in the republic since the winter of 2018, not all of these reports could be verified on time.

Almost all security agencies, mostly the police, are involved in abductions in Chechnya. Total abductions in 2022 numbered into the hundreds. Abductions have become so widespread, systematic, and habitual in Chechnya that summoning people to the police is virtually not practiced: the so-called security forces, known in Russia as *siloviki*, break into houses and forcibly take them away without any explanation. Upon receiving a report of such an incident, Memorial personnel usually conducted their own monitoring and investigation. Sometimes they were able to verify the report and find out the fate of the abducted person. Often the abducted person was released for ransom. In the CR this practice increased after the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

In addition, blogger and human rights activist Abubakar Yangulbaev helped verify twenty cases of abduction (including mass ones), which the opposition Telegram channel 1ADAT wrote about in 2022. It was found that in at least eight cases (not counting the case in the village of Dzhalka we had already described) people were really abducted and illegally imprisoned, and many were subjected to unlawful methods. Information from Yangulbaev when used is marked with a corresponding link. In other cases, unless otherwise specified, the information was obtained by Memorial personnel and volunteers.

On 10 January 2022, the Telegram channel 1ADAT reported on the abduction of two elderly men, Abubakar Ustaev and Shirvani Madaev, in the village of Katyr-Yurt, Achkhoy-Martan

district. The reason was a video that had gotten into the network and reached the Chechen authorities, though was originally intended for their friend living in Europe. One of the abductees on the video joked about the situation in Chechnya: *“Assalam Alaikum, you are blessed by Lord God Almighty, if only because you’re not living here. Here you need a lot of money or a whore mother [to live normally]. As far as it is possible for you, for the sake of the Almighty, stay there.”* According to Abubakar Yangulbaev, they were illegally detained for two days, allegedly at the Grozny Interior Department, where they were insulted and beaten. Then they were publicly humiliated at a general meeting in the mosque of Katyr-Yurt, where the audience declared the expulsion of one of the elders from the village.

On 4 February 2022, it became known about mass abductions of men in the village of Ishkhoy-Yurt in the Gudermes district. Among the abducted men were Askhab Umarov, Islam Gerzashev (a resident of the village of the 1st Molsovkhos in the Groznensky rural district), Yasin Tazaev, and Imam Kadyshiev. According to Abubakar Yangulbaev, for about a week they were illegally detained at the Gudermes police station, where they were beaten and humiliated. His relatives knew nothing about their whereabouts. The abductees were then released.

In 2022, the siloviki continued to abduct relatives of political and religious figures living in Europe and Turkey in order to put pressure on the latter. Abubakar Yangulbayev reported on several cases over the year that human rights activists and journalists did not make public and gave two examples. In one case, about 40 people were illegally detained in the Sharoy district and in Grozny. In the second case, 25 people were detained in Shali, Grozny, and Gudermes. The women were usually released on the day of the abduction, the men — within three days. Real estate documents were taken away from people to prevent them from selling, and also international passports — to prevent them from leaving the country. The use of physical violence was not reported.

On 2 July 2022, it became known about the mass abduction of residents of the village of Assinovskaya in the Sernovodsky (Sunzhensky prior to 2019) district. According to Abubakar Yangulbaev, among the detainees were Adam Machukaev, Azamat Chekiev, Isropil Amriev, Beslan Khayauri, who were illegally detained for a week at the Sernovodsky police station, without their relatives knowing about their whereabouts. The abductees were then released. It

was shown on local television how they were scolded by the police station chief, Khas-Magomed Magomadov, allegedly for using drugs.

In July 2022, Memorial members managed to verify and confirm the reports of multiple abductions of Chechen residents to ensure the flow of “volunteers” to Ukraine. Young people had indeed been abducted and then forced either to sign applications to “volunteer” for the war in Ukraine or their relatives were required to pay between 250,000 and 500,000 rubles for the release.

On 22 August 2022, in the village of Alkhazurovo in the Urus-Martan district, the siloviki abducted four local residents: Askhab Izrailov, Zelimkhan Khasiev, and two brothers Mingebaev. According to Abubakar Yangulbaev, they were illegally detained for several days at the Urus-Martan district police station.

There are also numerous cases of abduction of relatives of those who were subject to mobilization (those who had served in the army and had a military specialty, or former members of security forces) and left Russia, in order to force them to return. Abubakar Yangulbaev is reliably aware of five such cases since September 21, 2022: three in Grozny, one in Vedeno and one in Argun (no consent for publication of personal data was obtained).

In late September 2022, 1ADAT announced an interview with Muslim Madiev, one of the commanders of the Chechen “Dzhokhar Dudaev Battalion” fighting on the side of Ukraine, on 29 September 2022. 1aDAT reported that following this announcement about two dozen relatives of Muslim Madiev, including Lecha Madiev, Kyura Madiev, Lema Madiev, Ibrahim Madiev, Lyuba Madieva, Aset Madiev, Sadik Madiev and Tuka Madiev (mother of Muslim, 86) were abducted by the siloviki in Chechnya. According to information from Abubakar Yangulbaev, some of the abductees were taken to the Administration of Interior Ministry in Grozny. Some of them were released on the same day, others — a few days later.

On 30 September 2022, the twin brothers Ibrahim and Ismail Mazhiev, aged 27, were abducted in Grozny. No information about their whereabouts was available for more than a week. Then their relatives managed to find out that the twins were at the location of the special police regiment named after the hero of Russia, A. Kadyrov. The brothers were released two weeks later. The reasons for the abduction of the Mazhievs could not be ascertained.

On 6 October 2022, in Grozny, the siloviki seized several members of the Abubakarov family. They were required to convince Jabrail Abubakarov, who lived in Finland and publicly criticized the authorities of the Chechen Republic, to return. On the same day, everybody was released except Ibrahim, Jabrail's brother. Jabrail was illegally detained, apparently at the police station of the Kurchaloy district. In October 2022, a video of a phone conversation between Jabrail Abubakarov and the head of the criminal investigation of the Kurchaloy police station Akaev was posted to Youtube. Jabrail asked Akaev to release Ibrahim, who was being held hostage by the siloviki. Akaev promised to do so in response, provided Jabrail turned up at the police station for interrogation. Jabrail did not go to interrogation, but Ibrahim was nevertheless released in late October.

On 26-27 October 2022 in the village of Dzhalka, Gudermes region, nine young people were abducted. As Memorial volunteers managed to find out, these young people weren't engaged in anything illegal. They often communicated with each other via social networks and studied the Koran, which apparently raised suspicion in the siloviki. Immediately after their abduction, these young men were taken to the Argun police station, and a few days later — to the Neftepolk (Oil Protection Regiment) base in the village of Dzhalka. No one notified the relatives of the abductees' whereabouts, they learned about it through unofficial channels. The young men were released two months later, at the end of December 2022.

On 21 November 2022, in Grozny, 19-year-old Movsar Zakriev killed a traffic police inspector and, according to media reports, tried to shoot two other policemen, but was killed in return fire. According to Abubakar Yangulbaev, after that, there were mass abductions of Zakriev's

relatives and acquaintances. The women were released the same day, the men — a few days later.

In December 2022, at least 20 men were abducted in the town of Urus-Martan. On the night of December 11, there was a conflict in the town square between two Chechen siloviki, a reservist of the Russian national guard, Abdul-Malik Yevsultanov, and a traffic policeman, Turpal Eskiev. The latter provoked a verbal skirmish which turned into physical abuse and ended with gunfire in the air. Residents of Urus-Martan who observed the incident made several caustic comments, some supported the reservist. Video footage of the incident got on social media. The next day it was followed by the inadequate response of Ramzan Kadyrov who appeared on television threatening those who, in his opinion, behaved disrespectfully towards the policeman. After that, the town was flooded with the siloviki who staged a punitive action. Among those who came were high-ranking security officials, including Idris Cherkhigov, Kadyrov's nephew heading the republican department of traffic police. During the raid, they searched for participants and witnesses to the conflict. This was accompanied by mass arrests, phone checking, and damage to people's property – for example, the siloviki smashed car windows. A correspondent of republican TV explained these “actions” by saying that “*several local residents showed aggressive behavior in response to lawful demands of a traffic police officer*”. As a result, dozens of men were detained in Urus-Martan; they were kept in the basement cells of the town police station without any formal registration. Their relatives were not informed about their whereabouts. Some were beaten.

On 7 January 2023, in the village of Alkhan-Kala, the Groznensky rural district, personnel of force ministries of the Chechen Republic took more than 20 Chechen youths to an unknown destination. The names of 14 of them were identified: Said-Magomed Ayubov, Turpal Batsaraev, Magomed Vatsiev, Ramzan Vatsiev, Samad Gerikhanov, Muslim Gerikhanov, Adlan Isaev, Usman Musaev, Hamzat Solsaev, Halim Solsaev, Adam Solsaev (director of school No3), Usman Khatuev, Akhyad Khatuev, and Bekhan Khatuev.

The siloviki did not introduce themselves and refused to answer the relatives' questions about which particular units they belonged to. News of the young men's abduction spread fast on social networks and Chechen opposition Telegram channels. The information was confirmed by Kavkaz.Realii online media, and then specified that the abducted youths were being held in one

of the illegal prisons and that the two brothers, Khamzat and Lechi Solsaev, were being brutally tortured.

After that, daily raids were carried out in the village: the siloviki checked the contents of the young people's phones in an attempt to find out who was spreading information about the abductions. In addition, all these days they identified and brought to the district police station the young people who knew those abducted earlier. As of 16 January 2023, the relatives had no information about the reasons for the detention, the whereabouts, and the condition of the abductees.

Among the abducted were close relatives (the Khatuevs brothers, the Solsaevs brothers, and others). This method is used systematically: the second brother (or any relative) is abducted so that pressure can be put on the first of the relatives to make him more compliant and provide the required testimony in exchange for the release of the other. In most cases, this method of pressure worked.

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