



**Interregional Non-Governmental Organisation  
“CREW AGAINST TORTURE”**

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**Input for the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on  
Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances:  
The notion of short-term enforced disappearance**

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I. Introduction

1. The Crew Against Torture (hereinafter – CAT) is a Russian non-governmental organisation that continues the activities of the liquidated NGO “Committee Against Torture”, which was founded in Nizhniy Novgorod in 2000. At the moment, the CAT operates in the territory of central and southern Russia, as well as in the republics of the North Caucasus, covering approximately ¼ of the entire country’s population.

2. The CAT’s goals include combating torture and ill-treatment committed by law enforcement officials; providing legal, medical and social assistance to victims of torture, monitoring the situation with torture and raising public awareness. The CAT litigates cases before the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter – ECtHR) and the UN human rights mechanisms.

3. The North Caucasus, including the Chechen Republic, remains a territory of impunity.<sup>1</sup> Since 2003, when the CAT began its work in the North Caucasus, no perpetrator of torture or ill-treatment has been held accountable for these acts.<sup>2</sup> The disturbing practice of torture, extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detention continues to exist in the North Caucasus. The fear of further persecution and collective punishment of relatives prevents victims of torture and ill-treatment from officially filling a complaint and publicly speaking out about being tortured. It has become a common practice, where victims are forced to flee from Russia and live in hiding for the rest of their lives due to safety concerns. Furthermore, human rights defenders and civil society actors are unable to carry out their legitimate work without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment in the territory of the North Caucasus, especially the Chechen Republic.<sup>3</sup>

4. In the Chechen Republic, a disturbing system of illegal secret detention facilities has been established, where individuals are held for prolonged periods, ranging from weeks to months or even over a year, without any formal charges being brought against them. There, people are subjected to severe torture and ill-treatment and, in some cases, even secretly executed.<sup>4</sup> For

<sup>1</sup> PACE, Resolution 2445 (2022), “[The continuing need to restore human rights and the rule of law in the North Caucasus region](#)”.

<sup>2</sup> [The CAT statistics on the practice of investigating complaints of torture in the North Caucasian Federal District, 2022](#) (in Russian).

<sup>3</sup> UN Press Release, Russia: UN experts dismayed at violent attack against journalist Yelena Milashina and lawyer Alexander Nemov in Grozny, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/russia-un-experts-dismayed-violent-attack-against-journalist-yelena>.

<sup>4</sup> Novaya Gazeta, “Execution after death. According to the official version, these were terrorists killed by the security forces. In reality, they were victims of massacres in Chechnya” (in Russian), available at:

instance, some of the well-known secret detention facilities are located within the premises of the Akhmat Kadyrov patrol police regiment (the Kadyrov regiment) in Grozny,<sup>5</sup> as well as the premises of “oil regiment” of the Chechnya Ministry of the Interior, the premises of the Russian Special Police Force “Terek” (SOBR).

5. This input is primarily based on the CAT’s experience in combatting torture and ill-treatment, encompassing enforced disappearances, through strategic litigation and legal and policy advocacy, both internationally and in domestic jurisdictions. Its purpose is to contribute to the comprehension of the notion of short-term enforced disappearance and the underlying reasons for its occurrence.

## II. Common examples of short-term enforced disappearances in Chechnya

6. Enforced disappearances persist as a recurring criminal practice within the Chechen Republic. Unofficial statistics on disappearances continue to grow, while the Russian authorities persistently deny this reality.<sup>6</sup> In the CAT’s practice, there have been instances where individuals were abducted by State agents, held in secret detention facilities, and subjected to torture to extract false confessions in fabricated cases of terrorism-related crimes. Moreover, abductors demand ransoms from the victims’ relatives and seize their property in exchange for release. Individuals abducted and secretly detained for drug and alcohol use typically face a sum of around 300,000 RUB (3,000 EUR), while for LGBTI individuals, the price exceeds 1,000,000 RUB (10,000 EUR).<sup>7</sup>

*Case of Mr Abdul-Khalim Abdulmezhidov (included in the Russian Rosfinmonitoring List of Terrorists and Extremists)*

7. On 13 January 2017, Mr Abdulmezhidov was apprehended by seven police officers at his workplace and subsequently transported to the Shali Police station in Chechnya. There, he endured approximately four hours of torture, aimed at coercing a confession regarding his purported membership in an illegal armed group. Then from the station he was taken to the basement of the Kadyrov regiment and was detained there until 9 March 2017. During the detention he was systematically subjected to electric shocks to obtain his confession.

8. On 9 March 2017, the Mr Abdulmezhidov was admitted to the IVS in Shali. According to Mr Abdulmezhidov, his credit card was seized, and 17,000 RUB (190 EUR) were withdrawn by police officers. On 10 March 2017, he was taken from IVS to the police station where in the presence of a notary he was forced to sign a power of attorney to sell his car without mentioning a beneficiary. Subsequently, the car was sold, and Mr Abdulmezhidov has not received any money. Only on 25 March 2017, Mr Abdulmezhidov was officially arrested. Hence, from 13 January 2017 to 25 March 2017, in total for 71 days he was subjected to enforced disappearance. His family was unaware about his fate and whereabouts. The Russian authorities have never acknowledged his enforced disappearance for 71 days and torture, they never opened a criminal case into his allegations and failed to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation. Now his complaint into alleged torture is pending before the ECtHR.<sup>8</sup> Based on his confession he was convicted of terrorist related crime.

*Case of Mr Khasan Islamov, Mr Mikail Gazimagomadov and Mr Turpal-Eli Demelkhanov (included in the Russian Rosfinmonitoring List of Terrorists and Extremists)*

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<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/02/15/89211-kazn-posle-smerti>; “I served the Chechen police and did not want to kill people. Suleyman Gezmakhmayev, Senior Sergeant of the Regiment n.a. Kadyrov, tells for the first time about the extra-judicial killings of Chechnya residents without concealing the names of the torturers”, available at: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2021/03/15/ia-sluzhil-v-chechenskoi-politsii-i-ne-khotel-ubivat-liudei-18>.

<sup>5</sup> A.A. and Others v. Russia, no. 37008/19, 14 December 2021.

<sup>6</sup> PACE, Report Doc. 15544 (2022), “[The continuing need to restore human rights and the rule of law in the North Caucasus region](#)”; PACE, Report Doc. 15431 (2022), “[Ending enforced disappearances on the territory of the Council of Europe](#)”.

<sup>7</sup> North Caucasus SOS, “Torture and the Blood Market: How the ‘Hunt for Gays’ in Chechnya Has Become an Industry” (in Russian), available at: <https://sksos.org/ohota-na-geev-v-chechne/>

<sup>8</sup> Abdulmezhidov v. Russia, no. 5290/20, communicated on 2 March 2023.

9. On 3 February 2019, Mr Islamov, Mr Gazimagomadov and Mr Demelkhanov were taken from a flat and mosques by several police officers to the Naurskiy district police station in Chechnya. There, they were subjected to torture, including beatings, electrocution, and suffocation, in an endeavour to coerce confessions related to terrorism-related offences. Subsequently, on the following day, they were transported to the premises of the Kadyrov Regiment, where they were subjected to repeated electrocution and beatings with plastic pipes. In the morning of 5 February 2019, they were taken to an unidentified garage where they were detained for two months. Only on 1 April 2019, Mr Islamov, Mr Gazimagomadov and Mr Demelkhanov were officially arrested. Hence, from 3 February 2019 to 1 April 2019, in total for 57 days they were subjected to enforced disappearance, and their families were unaware about their fate and whereabouts. The Russian authorities have never acknowledged their enforced disappearance for 57 days and torture, they never opened a criminal case into their allegations and failed to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation. Now Mr Islamov's complaint into alleged torture is pending before the ECtHR.<sup>9</sup> Due to fear of persecution and the possibility of further torture, Mr Gazimagomadov and Mr Demelkhanov refused to submit their applications to the ECtHR. On the basis of their coerced confessions, they all were convicted of terrorism-related crimes.

### III. Persecution of LGBTI people in Chechnya

10. In the end of February 2017, the Chechen authorities carried out so-called "anti-gay purges" campaigns resulting in mass forced disappearances, incommunicado detention, torture and extra-judicial killings of individuals based on their perceived sexual orientation.<sup>10</sup> Several dozen people have been unlawfully detained in an unofficial detention centre close to the city of Argun and have been subjected to physical and verbal abuse while detained, as well as to torture, including electric shocks, beating, humiliation and threats to disclose their sexual orientation to their family. The enforced disappearances of these individuals spanned from several days to several months, although only one person formally lodged an official complaint.

#### *Case of Mr Maksim Lapunov*

11. Mr Maksim Lapunov is the first and only victim to officially file a complaint and to speak out publicly about the anti-LGBTI campaign in Chechnya. Although not Chechen by nationality, he lived and worked as an event organiser in the Chechen Republic since 2015. In the evening of 16 March 2017, Mr Lapunov was abducted while selling balloons on the street and held captive until 28 March 2017 in a basement, where he endured regular beatings by Chechen security forces. During his captivity, Mr Lapunov was confined to a small room covered with blood, with cardboard pieces serving as a makeshift bed and blanket, while a bucket served as his toilet. His captors demanded information about other gay individuals he knew and thoroughly inspected the messages on his phone. Under duress, he was forced to provide a testimony admitting his sexual orientation, reveal names and addresses of family members. Despite his relatives reporting his disappearance to the Russian authorities, they never acknowledged his enforced disappearance over the 12-day period, nor did they open a criminal case into his allegations or conduct a thorough and impartial investigation. As of now, his complaint into alleged torture is pending before the ECtHR.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Islamov v. Russia, no. [52876/22](#), communicated on 2 March 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Novaya Gazeta, "Honour killing. How the ambitions of a famous LGBTB activist awakened a terrible ancient custom in Chechnya", available at: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/01/71983-ubiystvo-chesti> (in Russian); Novaya Gazeta, "Gay Chechen massacres. We publish the stories of surviving witnesses", available at: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechensкими-geyami-publikuem-svidetelstva> (in Russian); UN Special Rapporteurs' Letter of 13 April 2017, (Reference UA [RUS 4/2017](#)); UN Special Rapporteurs' Letter of 11 February 2019, (Reference UA [RUS 1/2019](#)); PACE, Report Doc. 14572 (2018) "[Persecution of LGBTI people in the Chechen Republic \(Russian Federation\)](#)"; OSCE Rapporteur's Report under the Moscow Mechanism on alleged Human Rights Violations and Impunity in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation, [ODIHR.GAL/76/18/Corr.1\\*](#), 21 December 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Lapunov v. Russia, no. [28834/19](#), communicated on 14 November 2019.

#### IV. Persecution of opposition bloggers

12. The Chechen authorities consistently exhibit an unwillingness to tolerate any form of criticism or the disclosure of human rights situation within Chechnya. As a result, they actively strive to suppress such criticism, particularly from opposition channels on various social media platforms. To achieve this, the Chechen authorities resort to enforced disappearances and torture of bloggers and their relatives as a means to silence all critics effectively.

*Case of Mr Ibragim Yangulbayev (included in the Russian Rosfinmonitoring List of Terrorists and Extremists)*

13. On 21 May 2017, Mr Yangulbayev was apprehended and taken to the Grozny Police Department under suspicion of overseeing a social media group on the Russian social network “Vkontakte”, which expressed critical views concerning the Chechen authorities. There he was subjected to torture using electric shocks and beating with a plastic pipe in an attempt to force a confession. Subsequently, on 25 May 2017, Mr Yangulbayev was convicted on charges of petty hooliganism and sentenced to fifteen days of administrative detention. However, on 9 June 2017, the day he was due to be officially released, he was transferred to the premises of the Grozny Police Department, where he remained until 23 June 2017, when he was officially arrested. The Russian authorities have never acknowledged his enforced disappearance for 4 days and 14 days, they never opened a criminal case into his allegations and failed to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation. Now his complaint into alleged torture is pending before the ECtHR.<sup>12</sup>

##### **a. How is the notion of ‘short-term enforced disappearances’ understood and in which contexts do they occur?**

14. Chechen law enforcement officials follow a premeditated plan wherein they are required to resolve a specific number of terrorist crimes. As the actual occurrence of such crimes falls short of the mandated targets, a troubling pattern has emerged: individuals are unlawfully abducted, confined in unauthorised detention facilities, subjected to torture, and coerced into providing confessions under duress. These forced confessions serve to inflate the number of resolved terrorist crimes artificially. Moreover, additional incentives are offered to law enforcement officials for surpassing the set targets.

15. Given that the Chechen Republic is a relatively economically disadvantaged region, some law enforcement officials exploit enforced disappearance as a means of personal enrichment. In exchange for substantial rewards, they furnish families with information about the abductee’s fate and arrange for their release.

16. LGBTI individuals and critics of the Chechen authorities endure severe persecution in Chechnya. Should the authorities possess pertinent information, there exists a significant likelihood that these individuals may become victims of enforced disappearances.

17. Therefore, if an individual is not subjected to extrajudicial killing and survives, their enforced disappearance can persist for a period ranging from several days to several months.

##### **b. Which are the legal frameworks and practices that may lead to ‘short-term enforced disappearances’, and which are the legal frameworks and practices that might prevent them?**

18. Primarily, a significant lack of political will to eradicate the prevailing climate of impunity, terror, and fear gives rise to short-term enforced disappearances. Despite various European and UN human rights mechanisms repeatedly urging the Russian federal authorities to address the human rights situation in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya, concrete and effective measures have not been implemented. Furthermore, human rights defenders face considerable difficulties and dangers while attempting to operate within the region, making it challenging for them to effectively document and address human rights abuses. This impediment hampers the efforts to bring accountability to those responsible for the disappearances.

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<sup>12</sup> Yangulbayev v. Russia, no. [11410/20](#), communicated on 2 March 2023.

19. The fear among victims of enforced disappearances and their relatives plays a significant role in perpetuating the problem. Victims, aware of the risk of further persecution and retaliation, may be hesitant to come forward and report their cases to the authorities or human rights organisations. This climate of fear and intimidation discourages many victims from seeking justice and redress for the violations they have suffered.

20. Additionally, the absence of a specific legal framework that criminalises enforced disappearances as an independent crime further exacerbates the situation. Without a legal framework, perpetrators may evade accountability and escape appropriate punishment, thereby perpetuating the cycle of impunity.