



**STORIES OF ILLEGAL DETENTIONS
ALONG THE OCCUPATION LINE IN GEORGIA**

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The brochure was prepared by Human Rights Center.

Non-governmental organization the Human Rights Center, formerly the Human Rights Information and Documentation Center (HRIDC) was founded on December 10, 1996 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The HRIDC aims to increase respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and facilitate the peace-building process in Georgia. To achieve this goal, it is essential to ensure that authorities respect the rule of law and principles of transparency and separation of powers, to eliminate discrimination at all levels, and increase awareness and respect for human rights among the people in Georgia.

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- International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH); www.fidh.org
- World Organization against Torture (SOS-Torture – OMCT Network); www.omct.org
- Human Rights House Network; www.humanrightshouse.org
- Coalition for International Criminal Court; www.coalitionfortheicc.org

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This brochure aims to raise awareness regarding the problems and human rights violations ongoing in the occupied territories of Georgia, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. The brochure includes the real stories told by the individuals who have been the victims of illegal detention and kidnapping by the representatives of the Russian Federation in recent years.

The illegal actions carried out by the representatives of Russia's border forces, including the installment of the barbed wires, invasion into the territory of Georgia and arbitrary detention of people grossly violates fundamental human rights. When covering these stories and providing legal assessment, often, the facts and details which would give the full picture regarding the actions carried out against the victims and the harm suffered by them, are lacking. Also, often, the coverage by different media outlets and the legal assessments concentrate only on single facts and human rights violations that do not give opportunity to fully perceive the gravity of the crimes. In the brochure, we are presenting the real stories where the victims themselves are narrating what they went through since the moment of the detention till their release. We hope that such human stories will raise awareness regarding the situation existing at the occupation line both locally as well internationally.

The representatives of Human Rights Center conducted the field visits in the villages located along the dividing lines in 2018 where they documented human rights violations and heard the below provided stories. As a result of these monitoring missions, Human

Rights Center prepared report where it presented legal assessment of human rights violations and recommendations to various local and international bodies¹.

Due to the security issues existing in the occupation line and for the protection of personal information of the victims, the brochure does not specify the name of villages where the crimes are taking place. Also, the names of the victims are not revealed in order to avoid identification of individuals.

¹ “Zone of Barbed Wires: Mass Human Rights Violations along the Dividing Lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – 2019”:

[HTTP://HRIDC.ORG/ADMIN/EDITOR/UPLOADS/FILES/PDF/HRCREP2018/ZONE%20OF%20BARBED%20WIRES-REPORT%20-ENG%202018.PDF](http://hridc.org/admin/editor/uploads/files/pdf/hrcprep2018/zone%20of%20barbed%20wires-report%20-eng%202018.pdf)



STORY N1

A year and half ago, my husband and I went to visit my child on the other side. My daughter is married there. At that time, they still lived there. But recently they were forced to leave. I went to see my child.

I had just had a surgery. I had gone through 15 procedures of chemotherapy. I did not even have hair at that time.

I was walking with a hat. We came there and when we were coming back, I told my husband to come through the short way. He did not want to come through the short way. He thought that the guards would be standing there. He was afraid that we would get detained. He had been detained several times. He was saying that I would feel bad. He was suggesting going through the central road.

I told him that the guards would not be there till three o'clock. This was the information I had from my acquaintances.

So we went. I saw that the people walking before me crossed the "border". They were not arrested. I told my husband that we could go. I was bit in a hurry. I was

walking forward. He was following me. As it turned out, the guards were hiding in the forest. One Russian came out and came to me. He screamed at me and asked me to stop. I could not run. If I could run, I would have overrun him. But, after the surgery I did not have strength to run. I got arrested. My husband came as well.

There were two people. I told them that I went to see my child and a relative in Gali. "Do I not have a right to see my relative?" – I asked them.

I did not surrender. I showed them my passport. Everybody has passport from there. Why would I lie? I left two houses there and I do not want to lose those houses. My child has been arrested there several times and was deprived of all documents.

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Then they took my bag. They were searching it. I hid my documents in the pocket of my jacket. They said – "There is no road here. This is violation of "border". Why did you not leave through the main road?" They did not have mercy on me.

They arrested us in the morning and took us to Gali military base at ten o'clock in the evening. They did not write a fine. The Abkhazian person in the base said – "Why did you detain her? She had a passport and was visiting a relative. How could you detain such a sick woman there for so long? I told you to bring her here after three hours!"

The Russians did not answer them anything. It seemed like they did not have a good relationship.

They did not bring me water or food in the cell. I was like this since 10 am in the morning till 10 pm in the evening. From worrying and anxiety, my stomach ulcer burst. My husband called them twice – “How long can we stay here? Are you humans? The woman is sick! Release us soon!” “We know when to release you” – they called us with unpleasant voice.

When they took us in the evening, we got in the Willys Jeep. I felt bad on the road and I asked them to stop the car. I asked them to give me water. I asked them to stop the car several times but they did not. They were saying that we were almost at the destination. How can you treat someone like that?



STORY N2

My son was arrested five years ago. We have relatives there and he was helping them. They were bringing nuts to our side when they got arrested. He was supposed to come back in twenty minutes and since he did not come, I called on the phone. The phone was off. My husband was drunk. I told him that our child was arrested, that I was calling him, but he did not answer. He was bringing third round of nuts when he got arrested. They had already made two rounds.

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My husband and I went to look for our son. We were both crawling on the ground, in the mud. We were afraid, but what would you not do for your child?

We saw that Russians were taking nuts back. They had come with Ural car and were taking nuts. They did not treat the children badly.

My husband wanted to approach them, but I did not let him. I said that it would be easy to bring the child back but his release would have cost me at least 1000 GEL.

He believed me. Then we left by 200 meters and I called my child – “Son, where are you?” They heard me and asked him who I was. My child is chubby. One of them said that he also has a chubby child. Then they told him not to be afraid and that he would be released. There was another child arrested along with my child. That child had heart problems and they released him as well.

We live in such conditions. Nobody can go there. Everybody is afraid. When the children were coming from there to school, the school principal knew that they might not have come to the first lesson, that they would not be allowed or sent back. Now, the child of my relative speaks Russian and Abkhazian so well, it is crazy. Now they are taught Russian and Abkhazian in school. What can we do? Life is this way. We have been displaced for 25 years now. My blind mother, brothers, sister-in-law and their little children were not even given one room on this side. We are living in such difficulty. They do not have proper conditions and they stayed there. They come here for the medication and doctor. But, my mother has not come here for months.



STORY N3

I was going to the garden. I was not yet there when they came up from behind. They had crossed to our side approximately 80 meters. They were crawling in the ground. They were in masks. I have never seen them before and I did not expect them. It was morning. Then it became noisy. I looked back and there was nothing. Then the dogs started to bark. I looked back again and there was nothing. If I saw something, I would not have continued walking. When I approached the garden, I saw them and by instinct, I started to run to the opposite side. They screamed at me to stop or they would shoot. They were Ossetians not Russians.

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They were dressed in uniforms. They were armed. I got afraid only when I saw them in masks. I was no longer afraid afterwards. I started to oppose them. But what could I do? They had guns. They took handcuffs. I thought that it was electric shock device in the beginning and got very afraid. Then they put me on the ground and they wanted to handcuff me. They pressed me so hard that my hands and neck was black. They beat me and pressed me. I knew that my spouse was going to come.

My spouse shouted that he would come. I shouted back not to. This was the only thing that I was shouting. Then they took me on the other side by force.

When they took me there, I was asking them in Georgian language if they were Ossetian. They asked me to speak Russian. I did not say a word in Russian. Then a car came, dark blue. The military personnel were sitting in that car. They were Russian. They took me to the military base and blindfolded me. Then they took me probably to the yard. They brought me downstairs. They were asking me to speak Russian. They were saying that I could speak well. I was answering in Georgian that I did not know Russian. When they asked me something, I would say that I did not know. They asked me to admit that I crossed the “border” and said that they would release me if I admitted it. I told them that I did not violate anything and that they came to our side and took me. They said that 50 meters behind the barbed wires belonged to them. “If it is yours, I had not even come there” – I answered them in Georgian. I understand Ossetian and Russian well. But, I cannot speak well. Then they printed the documents. It was approximately one hundred pages. They made me sign all hundred pages. I did not sign only the page where it said

that I crossed the “border”. Then they came and asked me to urgently sign that page. Then there was pressure. They did not beat me, but they verbally insulted me. The Russians were swearing at me. They had masks on. There was little table and bed where I was sitting. There was camera in the cell as well.

They did not allow me to make phone call. Then they took me to Tskhinvali, to the detention cell. It was Saturday. I was sitting for two days. It was so dirty that I did not even lie down. On Monday morning they took me upstairs.

They did not bring me anything on Saturday. They were not saying anything. I thought they would release me on Sunday. Nobody was saying anything. Then they brought a lawyer and a translator. I could understand them better than they. The lawyer said – “Do not be afraid, there will be trial and we will see what happens”. Till Wednesday I was only signing the documents. I did not even read what I signed. They did not say anything. I was just sitting alone. What could I do? There was another person arrested. He was Ossetian. He knew Georgian and I asked him to ask them what they were planning to do. He said that the trial was planned next day and they would let me go. Nothing was mentioned about the fine. The trial was held in the evening. The lawyer was sitting there just formally. It looked like a theater. The judge was very aggressive.

After the first trial, I was sentenced to one-month imprisonment. I asked them to take me home. The judge said – “I want to go home as well”.

We went to the prison. They opened the door and then I was really scared. Then the prosecutor came. He said that he wanted to see what kind of conditions I lived in. They inspected the cells.

The trial was held on Tuesday. The prosecutor asked not to cry and said that I would be released after the trial. Then the trial was held. The judge was woman. I did not listen to her at all. But this time she was different. She acted kinder. They brought me water and napkins since I was crying.

Then they asked me – “do you agree?” I said – “yes”. Then they asked what I was agreeing to. I said – “just let me go and I would sign anything”.

They concluded that I violated the “border”. They passed conditional sentence. The judge congratulated me and said that I was free. I said – “on our side, when you have conditional sentence, you have to check on probation every month. “How can I come here for probation?!” – I joked. The verdict was just funny – one year conditional sentence.



STORY N4

I was arrested in 2015. I was seven-months pregnant and I was afraid. I had to go to the doctor. I had very problematic pregnancy. Stress affected me badly. It would not be advisable to go to the clinic in Gali. So, I decided to go to Zugdidi.

I finished school in 2013. I crossed “border” every day to go to school. Several times they sent us back. But we still managed to successfully finish the school.

After I got married, my husband and I lived in Gali. It was hard. But, we decided to risk and come to Zugdidi when I got pregnant. My husband let me go forward. He was following me. There were many people with him who wanted to come to the other side, including my neighbors with children. We left at 5 am in the morning. We walked for 7-8 kilometers. When we approached the “border”, we could not notice them – they were standing there and arrested us on the spot. They said that their territory was not on the other side and they would not let us go. They took us to the detention cell. More people they detained, faster they took them. We were seven including the

children. They did not bring us water, food or anything else. We were placed in the underground tunnel. I felt bad. I started to have hypertension. I felt very bad for two days. The air was heavy. The windows were not open. The little light came from the hole. There was no mattress and nothing else. They did not allow us to make phone call. They took everything from us.

For about 12 pm in the evening we went to Gali. We had to pay fine which was 120 GEL for every individual if you lived there. If you were from another region, then you had to pay more. The case could even go to Sokhumi court. They wrote us checks and let us go.



STORY N5

It was 4:30 pm. I was lying in the shade when I heard noise. They came with automatic firearms. There was 80-year-old man nearby. They did not attack him. They said that they had nothing to do with the elderly.

I was in the graveyard. They say half of it is their territory, but our dead are buried there. We buried a guy one week ago and I came there to see the graveyard. If you do not have GPC, you will not know where you are.

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One day we were making the graveyard to bury a friend's father. They came from the other side and lay down near. There were little boys with us. They wanted to attack them. We stopped them.

They move freely at the "border". It was two of them. I told them that I did not violate the line and that it was our territory. They started to handcuff me, but I did not allow them. I dragged them 50 meters down. They got tired and I got tired as well. I asked them where they came from. One was from Siberia. Another looked Kazakh. I dragged them more to our territory. I am 52 years old and I got old. I threw the handcuffs. Then one of them hit me

with an automatic firearm. I took off top clothes and was covered in blood.

I was suffocating. I was opposing them for 1 hour. That elderly man was shouting at them to let me go. I know what I would have done if there was someone to help me. But, our police would have arrested me in that case. Once, one man took away automatic firearm from them and beat them up. Our police arrested this man for this.

When they left to look for the handcuffs, I ran to our side. Then the police and ambulance came.

Our police patrols only when someone gets arrested. If they stood there, the border guards would be more cautious. When our police come here, they do not cross the line.



STORY N6

We never had a problem to work in this land. This family has a land here. That family has a land here. We are about six such families in this area. Such families live also in other parts of the village. They also have land. We had been cultivating it as usual. Two or three years ago we did not have any problem. Then, all of a sudden, my husband and I got taken. We were working in the land. But, they did not say anything bad to us. We were taken to Gali from here. We had to spend one night there. Then, in the morning, they released us.

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We had water and food. Abkhazian guy gave us food. She said – “Eat grandma, you must be hungry”.

We did not have to pay fine. I said, my child died and I have money to build graveyard. Abkhazian guy got mad. He said – “How could Russians bring you here?”