

The soldiers' mothers organization in Russia: how does it work

In one of the military units situated in small town K. something happened in September, 2002. The loaded with armaments military truck disappeared. The commander of the unit decided to solve a case with the most simple means. He formed up all the soldiers who, at the moment, were free of duty, and began to beat them with the spade-stick. He beat the first five soldiers in the row for three hours and then declared that he makes interval for lunch. He promised to continue beating after lunch till he finds a thief.

54 soldiers decided not to wait continuation of commanders' «investigation». They left the military unit, leaving behind only those soldiers who were on guard. For them to leave their posts meant to do serious military crime.

54 soldiers marched 90 kilometers from K. to Volgograd — the capital of Volgogradskaya oblast (one of administrative regions in Russia). In the night they slept in the forest. They have nothing to eat. Nobody asked them what they are doing without officers. Nobody chased them. They enter Volgograd in the afternoon of the next day. The soldiers did not know address or telephone of soldiers mothers organization. But they were convinced the mothers will save them. Somebody helped them to find the office of soldiers mothers committee — «Mothers' Right» with the chairwoman Tatiana Zazulenko.

After that solution of the case transformed into the matter of HR technologies. The soldiers mothers took from every soldier two statements — one, addressed to the organization with their request to intervene, and the second one — to the military prosecutor whose duty is to observe the laws. They also sent the list of soldiers to the Moscow office of the Union of the Committees of Soldiers Mothers of Russia (UCSMR) together with description of events. It was decided to leave the soldiers to sleep in the «Mothers' Right» office and next morning to march to the prosecutor together with soldiers mothers. The members of organization somehow managed to give food to all exhausted boys and called a doctor to confirm the beating traces.

Early in the morning the women returned to the office. To their surprize it was empty and evidently after chaotic search. Some documents were missing, some equipment did not function. Soon the mothers found that soldiers were taken back to their military unit deep in night packed in several military trucks. The mothers came to the prosecutor with their statements and demanded to investigate the case. They called journalists and organized the press-conference. In Moscow the UCSMR did the same. Their interviews were shown on TV channels. The intentions of military to hide the case failed. In the end the special military command of high rank officers from Moscow had to be sent to investi-

gate what is going on in the K. military unit. The Main Military Prosecutor in Moscow received the official letter from UCSMR concerning unlawful events in K. and was involved in the case.

The investigation concerning truck stealing and beatings is continuing. The commander of the military unit already lost his post. The soldiers were not punished for the so called «deserting». The soldiers mothers are waiting for investigation results to give them publicity.

It was the first case of soldiers organized deserting from the military unit of such scale. The case shows very clearly that the only possibility for soldiers to protect their HR is support of HR soldiers mothers organizations. By their estimate, up to 40 thousands «deserters» are hiding all over the country trying to save their life and health. The UCSMR will continue to demand immediate abolishment of involuntary conscription.

Terror in Moscow and perspectives of Chechen crisis settlement

I, being a member of the Union of the Committees of Soldiers mothers of Russia since 1993, have no intentions to speak of our emotions connected with the «theater of war» in Moscow. There could be understanding or rejection of our feelings, but the most important thing is not emotions, but the consequences of terrorist attack.

Almost on the eve of 23 October events the Union of the Committees of Soldiers Mothers of Russia organized conference with the title «Dead-end in Chechnya: where to search the road to peace?» (18-19 October, 2002). In the conference participated 70 regional soldiers mothers organizations from various cities and towns of Russia, Russian politicians, Russian and Chechen scientists, representatives of Chechen organizations and other HR and peaceful NGO, of Chechen administration, of Russian administration, of military, and also group of Chechen people on hunger-strike who were at that moment in Moscow and many other people. We tried to find a way to the peaceful Chechnya where the chain of arbitrariness, crimes, corruption, mistakes, negligence of people interests and armed forces actions lead to the tragic situation. As woman organization, taking into consideration the principles of gender equality, we demanded participation in decision making process, concerning peace in Chechnya, and warned the President and the State Duma of our intention to involve the world community through the UN Security Council in the settlement of Chechen conflict.

Unfortunately, after terror in Moscow there is a danger that dead-end situation in Chechnya will deepen. Terror attack makes absolutely evident the fact that any citizen of the country is not secure of HR violation neither from the state nor terrorists and criminals. The official statements shows that the state are not ready to work out complex policy which could bring peace to the country, to

involve society into decision making process, to take into consideration the interests of every social, gender or ethnic group. The plans of Russian leadership concerning the so called «constitutional process» which is now propagated by the Kremlin representatives is unclear as they were worked out without any public discussions. The military in Chechnya keep in their hands all the power in the region. There are many questions about antiterrorist operation of 26 October which brought death to more than hundred hostages. The HR protectors in Russia demand all the information about results of investigation which, officially, is continuing. It is quite possible to understand the statement of the President Putin, made after events in «Nord-Ost» theater, as the call to use exclusively armed means in the fight against international terrorism. But the matter is the situation in Chechnya, being, undoubtedly, a powerful generator of terrorism, by itself is created by desperation and social degradation of its population, by military arbitrariness, by growing number of innocent victims, by splits in Chechen society, in general, — by cultivating of violence as the main instrument of federal policy. This mixture makes the situation worse and worse. The youngest generation of Chechen people sow nothing in their life except violence. They are out of any normal culture. This problem is ignored by the state.

The soldiers mothers firmly stand for peaceful settlement in Chechnya. Our organization was the very first NGO in Russia which made the antiwar statement long time ago — in November, 1994. Since that time, in spite of all our efforts, thousands of our sons lost their life in the region, thousands of them were disabled by physical or mental traumas. These days there are about 2000 servicemen — prisoners of war in Chechnya and none of the state bodies is able to do anything for their rescue. In their military units the soldiers - prisoners of war are registered as deserters, i. e. criminals. That is why we do not accept the federal policy in Chechnya, that is why we will continue to act for peace, for human rights of all people involved in the conflict, for life and freedom, against state terrorism in any forms. We condemn international terrorism, but we are convinced that majority of the state powers are to blame for spreading this crime, this human sickness on the planet.

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