



INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE Foundation

Polish Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture

Polski Ośrodek Rehabilitacji Ofiar Tortur ul. Jazdów 7/30, Warszawa
Polish Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Survivors tel. +48530999907, +48530999908 biuro@ihif.eu

TO THE POLISH AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

September 26, 2016

URGENT PETITION TO OPEN EASTERN BORDER OF EUROPE IN TERESPOL FOR PEOPLE FLEEING FROM PERSECUTION

The only route out to escape from violence, torture or death for many of the inhabitants of Chechnya and other persecuted people in post-soviet countries is the border crossing Brest - Terespol. But this gateway to Europe for the forced migrants is practically closed.

According to the international law a person fleeing from political persecution is not required to have visa to place the asylum request. Just their declaration that they request international protection, asylum or refugee status should be enough. Yet migrants that we met in Belarus Brest during September intervention and fact finding mission reported that each time they requested asylum from Border Guard officers in Terespol, Poland they were refused entry on the grounds of their EU/Polish visa missing.

Their situation of these forced migrants is dramatic: over a thousand of people stuck in Belarus Brest within few kilometers from the border of Poland. Most of them fleeing to Europe because of the torture they endured, as evidenced by still unhealed wounds, or photos taken shortly after past torture. Part of them disabled in result of the violence experienced. They flee with all families, small children. Many have no means to rent any warm shelter. Children cold, tired and sick but still this population, bound by their culture to endure hardships, is rarely asking anyone for help.

As psychologists and doctors of Polish Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture we trained employees of the Border Guard to identify victims of torture and other vulnerable migrants. The purpose of such trainings was to improve the access to special rights and care to most vulnerable. Still none of the ones that we identified and documented ourselves as torture victims have been let through the border crossing in Terespol last week and allowed to place asylum request in Poland.

Those whom the Border Guard did not allow to request asylum on the territory of the Republic of Poland survived among other following torture:

- Electric shocks; burns
- Beating with batons; bottles filled with water, plastic pipes, electric and kicking all over their bodies and on the head, usually with the exception of the face (not to leave visible traces);
- Threatening death of themselves, and threats of death, torture/rape on children and relatives;
- Inflicting stab wounds with a knife and sharp objects, shooting wounds through legs/arms;
- Forcing to witness torture of others;
- Keeping in inhumane conditions during illegal detention;
- Deprivation of sleep, food, light, water;
- Denying access to medical care

Those who flee from torture and persecution frequently take with them children, wives or husbands, and - if they can – even old parents. Otherwise, the ones left behind are also at risk of being tortured in order to reveal the whereabouts of a relative who managed to escape. For the absolute majority of these refugees there is no way back. When the refugees came to Brest it was summer, they fled in a way that their departure would not draw attention of neighbors, so they travelled with very little luggage and warm clothing. They were sure that soon they will cross the border. Now few months passed and the temperature dropped down. Migrants remain in summer clothes and shoes. At the station is cold, many have no money to rent an apartment even for one day. Most children and pregnant women are ill, don't eat any hot meals and have no free access to hot water or even toilet. People at the station have the right to lie down on the benches only between 1 am and 6 am. The rest of the time they must spend in a seated position. They have no access to medicines and free medical care. Some have no money for another trip to Polish border in Terespol.

Dignity is central to the Chechen culture and it does not allow them to beg, show self-pity or ask for help. So on their behalf we ask all to do all in their power to help and intervene so the Polish border will open for the persecuted people seeking international protection! Their only alternative for them is facing further persecution, torture and even death! Let's help them to see Europe as a land that still believes in solidarity with the victims of totalitarianism and terror.

Anyone who wishes to support our efforts help the refugees on East Border of EU - through volunteering, humanitarian interventions and financial support please contact Polish Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture through email: eastborder@ihif.eu.

Due to the difficult transports to Belarus we will be grateful for financial support - on account of the Foundation International Humanitarian Initiative **97 1030 0019 0109 8530 0044 9039 - with a note "border assistance"**

Thank you!

Psychologists and doctors of the Polish Centre of Rehabilitation for the Victims of Torture

(Polish Centre of Rehabilitation for the Victims of Torture is a project of International Humanitarian Initiative Foundation - supported by the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture)