

URGENT ACTION

FIVE MEN IN SECRET DETENTION IN UKRAINE

Authorities must urgently release five men believed to be in secret detention in the Security Service's compound in Kharkiv, northeast Ukraine.

Vladimir Bezobrazov and **four other men** (whose names Amnesty International cannot make public) are believed to be in secret detention in a compound of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kharkiv, northeast Ukraine. 13 people have been released from the compound in the last month, although the Ukrainian authorities continue to deny that anyone has ever been secretly detained.

Vladimir Bezobrazov, a Russian national, was arrested while on family holiday in Karolino-Bugaz, Odessa region, on 17 May 2014. The head of the local border guard unit overheard Bezobrazov making comments in support of the pro-Russian separatists in a café and arrested him on the spot. After two days in the border guards' base in Karolino-Bugaz, Vladimir Bezobrazov "confessed" to coming to Ukraine to recruit pro-Russian separatists fighters. He was transferred to a prison in Odessa and charged with attempted violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity (Article 110 of the criminal code). Vladimir Bezobrazov retracted his "confession" in court, claiming that it was made under duress.

On 2 March 2015, Ukrainian prisoner exchange mediators approached Vladimir Bezobrazov's lawyer. The mediators offered to have Vladimir Bezobrazov released in exchange for a Ukrainian fighter captured by the pro-Russian separatists in Luhansk, if he confirmed his "confession" in court. Vladimir Bezobrazov agreed, and on 6 March 2015 the Ovidiopol District Court handed him a three-year suspended sentence. As Vladimir Bezobrazov was leaving the court building, a van drove up to the entrance; several men stepped out, bundled him inside and drove off. He has been missing since. In May 2015, Vladimir Bezobrazov's mother Lyudmila Korobova learned from a man who had been released from secret detention at the Kharkiv SBU that her son was being held there. Between May 2015 and August 2016, Lyudmila Korobova received one phone call from Vladimir Bezobrazov and several phone calls from released cell-mates confirming his detention in the Kharkiv facility.

An investigation into his disappearance opened by the police after his mother complained in May 2015 has yielded no results to date.

Please write immediately in Ukrainian, Russian or your own language:

- Urging the Ukrainian authorities to disclose the whereabouts of Vladimir Bezobrazov and the four other men believed to be held in secret detention in the SBU compound in Kharkiv;
- Urging them to either charge these men with a recognizable criminal offence and ensure their immediate access to a lawyer and their family, or release them immediately;
- Calling on them to carry out a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into the allegations of enforced disappearances carried out by the SBU, including that of Vladimir Bezobrazov, and into the allegations of unlawful detentions at the SBU compound in Kharkiv, and bring all those responsible to account in fair trial proceedings.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

Chief Military Prosecutor of Ukraine
Anatoliy Matios
Vul. Riznytska 13/15
01601, Kyiv
Ukraine
Fax: +380 44 280 2603
Email: press-service@gp.gov.ua
Salutation: Dear Mr Matios

Head of SBU
Vasyl Hrytsak
Volodymyrska St., 35
01601, Kyiv-34
Ukraine
Fax: +380 44 226 3431
Email: pressinfo@ssu.gov.ua
Salutation: Dear Mr Hrytsak

And copies to:
Presidential Commissioner
for Supervision of the SBU
A.M. Polyakh
Vul. Bankova, 11
01220 Kyiv
Ukraine
Email: polyakh@apu.gov.ua

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

FIVE MEN IN SECRET DETENTION IN UKRAINE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 21 July, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch published the joint report *“You Don’t Exist”: Arbitrary Detentions, Enforced Disappearances, and Torture in Eastern Ukraine* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/4455/2016/en/>). Amongst other abuses, the report documents cases of enforced disappearance in government-controlled territory and provides evidence suggesting that unlawful, unacknowledged detentions have taken place in the SBU’s premises in Kharkiv, Kramatorsk, Izyum, and Mariupol. It includes compelling, detailed testimonies by three individuals who claimed that they had been held unlawfully in unacknowledged detention by members of the SBU for periods ranging from six weeks to 15 months.

During official meetings with a number of Ukrainian officials in July 2016, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch delegates were told that the SBU does not have detention centres except for one in the capital Kyiv, and that it does not hold individuals in secret. At the same time, the Chief Military Prosecutor of Ukraine gave assurances that all allegations against the SBU presented in the joint report would be effectively investigated.

In the past, official investigations into alleged human rights abuses by members of Ukrainian forces and so-called volunteer battalions engaged in fighting with the separatist forces in eastern Ukraine were not effective.

One of the former victims of enforced disappearance, Kostyantyn Beskorovaynyi (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR50/4647/2016/en/>), who was released from secret detention in February 2016 and currently lives on the government-controlled territory in Ukraine, told Amnesty International about the threats and harassment he had faced since his release intended to force him to change his testimony and come up with an alternative explanation for his 15-month absence from home and work.

It appears that the practice of enforced disappearances is linked to the process of prisoner exchange by the warring parties in Donbass, eastern Ukraine. Prisoner exchanges by the two sides to the conflict in Donbass started in spring 2014 and have been marred by violations of the human rights of individuals intended for exchange on both sides. Evidence presented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in the abovementioned joint report suggests that some detainees have effectively become “currency” for exchange.

Following the publication of the report on 21 July, six individuals were released on 25 July and seven on 2 August 2016 from the SBU’s secret detention centre in Kharkiv. Amnesty International interviewed seven of them, and they all independently confirmed the existence of the secret detention facility in Kharkiv. They also independently of each other corroborated the information published in the report regarding the practice of enforced disappearance of individuals by the SBU, and provided further details and expanded the information regarding the treatment of inmates at this facility. Moreover they confirmed that five men, including Vladimir Bezobrazov, were still being held in Kharkiv as of 2 August. Amnesty International has communicated the names of all five to the Chief Military Prosecutor, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Presidential Administration of Ukraine.

Name: Vladimir Bezobrazov and four others whose names cannot be disclosed
Gender m/f: all male.