



«SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG»

IN THE MIRROR OF VIEWS, FACTS, FIGURES

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Roman Mogilevsky, Tatiana Shaidarova

**«SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG» IN THE MIRROR
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This book is the first in a series of publications devoted to 25 years of the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization activities. The publication is expected to talk about the difficult path of the organization, its formation, principles on which these activities are based, people and people rescued, about the time and its reflection in the work of the organization.

The works of the artist E.A.Osipova are used in this book

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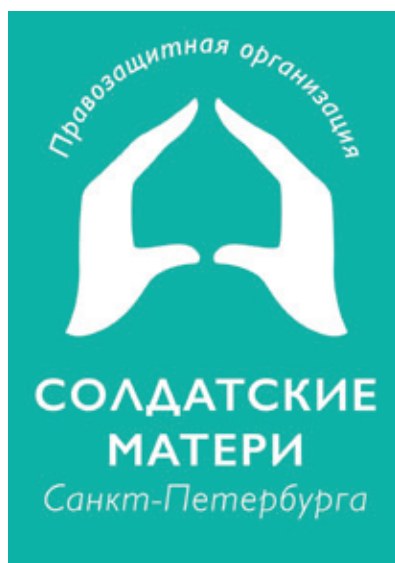
*«In Germany, they first came for the Communists, but I said nothing because I
was not a communist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, but I said nothing because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists, but I was not a trade unionist, and said
nothing. Then they came for the Catholics, but I, being a Protestant, did not say
anything. And when they came for me – for I have no one to stand up...»*

**Martin Friedrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöller,
Pastor, a prisoner of Sachsenhausen and Dachau**

INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

The idea of writing this book originated from the authors during the work on sociological support of a number of projects for the human rights organization «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg». Observing daily activities of people working in the organization, changes in their lives and in their attitudes as well as changes in fate and perception of life situations of those who turn to them for help, we should note that the organization doesn't not only provide support and hope but also forms knowledge of the way in which it is necessary to follow one's goal. This is very important in today's world. As we see based on the information on the website of the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» (www.soldiersmothers.ru), the organization puts the empowerment program in the framework of its activities. It demonstrates its everyday work. In this book we tried to tell you how exactly, according to its head, together with its creators the organization itself became effective, which historical moments in the country's life, being intertwined with the fate of people, have formed the need to move along that path. «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» by example shows how civil society should act, not in declarations, but in fact to show people that they can be strong, responsible, able to decide their own fate. As well as show and tell them, bring their existing constitutional rights closer to them in the. This allows people to believe in themselves and anyone can see the reality as the wave of empowerment snowball overtakes more and more people, and each of them begin to demonstrate features of a Citizen.



2015. JUNE.

On June, 23rd Landtag of Hesse announced that the award of Hessen Peace Prize 2015 goes to Ella Polyakova – a Russian citizen, chairman of the human rights organization «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg», member of Presidential Council of the Russian Federation for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights.

Trustees Award Board, which includes representatives of the most influential German Peace Research Institute said that they wish to distinguish passionate and persistent commitment of human rights activist to ideas of peace and democracy, as well as Ms. Polyakova activities within «Soldiers' mothers of Saint Petersburg» public organization.

Hessen Peace Prize was established in 1993 and is the highest award of the state of Hessen, which is awarded to fighters for peace and rapport between people. Exactly 10 years ago among those receiving the award was, in particular, His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama for the Tibetan commitment to non-violence resistance principle.

It's only the second time in the history of Award when Russian citizen receives it – the first of our compatriots in 1998 was retired general Alexander Lebed for his efforts to stop the First Chechen War.

The ceremonial presentation of the award took place in Wiesbaden on July, 17th.

In her welcoming speech, Ms. Ella Polyakova said:

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

First of all, let me thank you for this honor. Of course, I want to express my gratitude to citizens of the state of Hesse for the opportunity to express my gratitude being here and now and once again call on the society to unite in protecting human life and human dignity.

Not that much time (by historical standards) passed since the end of World War II. It seems that the wounds of that war managed to heal just now and not everywhere and not in everything. And back again the world is anxiously watching how false views, ambitions and bad intentions of politicians, religious fundamentalists, leaders of some states, irresponsible commanders, adventurers who have experience and desire to fight, are now and then pushing the world to the new total conflict that, given the nature of modern weapons, can put an end to human history and its achievements.

Modern world – like a shagreen leather – shrinks rapidly from constant conflict, injustice, unfriendliness, lack of solidarity and mutual understanding, growing cult of force.

World – with the development of information technologies - becomes small as the Little Prince planet. This is a fragile substance and its price is a human life.

We all know that behind such phrases like «World Without War»; «World without violence»; «Human dignity is above all» there are human lives and names belonging to all humanity like Andrei Sakharov, Galina Starovoitova, Anna Politkovskaya, Natalia Estemirova, Boris Nemtsov and many others who have gone into oblivion, leaving us with the world responsible for it.

Let's honor them in loving memory with a moment of silence.

It is possible that there is nobody who is would be more interested in preserving and promoting peace, protection of human life, overcoming injustice, absence of poverty and disease than mothers. Those who are – unlike anybody else – giving life, being constantly sick at heart for successful lives of their children, are showing concern about the activities of governmental and economic institutions, officials, businessmen and other leaders, who are largely determining their life chances and life quality.

Researchers noticed that in these circumstances the «effect of blissful ignorance» can be seen when many people who experience economic crises or environmental disasters, military conflicts, totalitarian expansion or personal crises deliberately refuse to acknowledge their own knowledge, competence and personal activities, recognition of their own opinion's value.

Human Rights for Russian citizens is an unconscious reality. There is a need to overcome the existing alienation between citizens and their rights enumerated in the Constitution of Russia.

It's only when all states all over the world will guarantee rights and freedoms of individuals then world and people will live in harmony with each other. Universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – this is what we demand and should demand from the state every day.

I want to appeal to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a document that emerged after the world experienced another disaster. Our states, signing this very Declaration, were taking into account that disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which outraged the conscience of mankind, and that creation of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and will be free from fear and needs is proclaimed as the highest aspiration of people.

Now, 67 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have forgotten the meaning of the most important human rights - keeping the fragile peace and avoid violence and bloodshed. And our task now is to stop neglect and contempt for human rights. When I say «we» – I mean all of us, no matter where one lives on the planet Earth, human rights know no borders. And this principle is particularly important now, right now it is important not to stop the dialogue with one another, and to seek constructive solutions to promote the development of friendly relations between nations.

Today, however, our task is to find new mechanisms for preservation and development of the world.

Thank you for your attention!

HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS CHAIRMAN



Ella M. Polyakova started her social activity in 1990 as an active member of the Leningrad People's Front¹. Her professional background includes more than 25 years of experience in human rights activities. She was elected Chairman of the human rights organization «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» in 1991. She is: the winner of the Galina Starovoitova Prize (1999), winner of the Aachen Peace Prize (2004); one of the 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (2005); member of the Human Rights Council of St. Petersburg (since 2007), winner of the Moscow Helsinki group award in the field of protecting human rights in the nomination «for the development of the human rights tradition of youth» (2010), winner of Hessen Peace Prize (2015); member of the human rights Commission under the governor of St. Petersburg (since 2006). Ms. Polyakova is an expert on military affairs at the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation (since 2010); member of the Council under the President of Russian Federation on the development of civil society and human rights (since 2011);

¹ Leningrad People's Front – the largest informal political organization in Russia in 1989-1990. The idea of its creation was to consolidate people of different views but based on general democratic principles.



It's already 25 years since the foundation of the organization. Such a long life if you look from a distance, and such a short moment for those who work in it...Here is Ella M. Polyakova, «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» chairman recollection on how the idea was engaged in military and recruits issues originated in far '90s, on the beginning of organization activities:

– Ella, what has caused the emergence of the organization «Soldiers' mothers of St. Petersburg»?

– This is the reaction of society and its self-organization. Our organization came up at a «productive» time for this – 1990s. Then I was involved in many things and army was not the first on the agenda. But then I began to visit «hot» spots of the country: elections during the war in Nagorno-Karabakh²; observer at the referendum on Georgia state independence in Tbilisi³ – and there I saw how a War is being prepared: questions were posed so to push people; traveled to Tskhinvali during the war in South Ossetia in 1992, to Pridnestrovye – which was also in a serious conflict in the year 1992...At these troubled areas I saw what war means for the crumbling empire...When the empire falls apart, the best way to divert attention people from those responsible for crimes made and current – is to organize wars.

² The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the control of Nagorno-Karabakh – Azerbaijan's territory, populated by Armenians (1991-1994). The first major bloody ethnic conflict in the former USSR.

³ On March, 31, 1991 Georgia held a referendum on the restoration of state independence. The referendum was attended by 90.5 percent of voters, 98.93 percent voted for the independence. Two regions of the republic – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – have declared their special position and their desire to secede from Georgia.

What was in the air at that time? Governance was weakening, mood of people to live openly was growing, so...tops weakened and bottoms could not endure any longer...That's when we recognized the need to address the problem that could not be seen by the society, it was considered closed, taboo issue. There were a lot, a lot of deserters, who were accused and had no one to defend them due to fear...There were isolated cases of recruits, who single-handedly tried to defend their right for dignity, which was grossly violated. Some rarely succeeded but usually the guys ran into the wall. At the same time there were Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, created by the authorities, which to some extent could be helpful, but not in key issue – people who addressed them, were heard, registered but after all remained unprotected.

That is when this self-organization began. We had attempts to self-organize society in different directions. I remember my own feelings at that period. In the 1990 the first conference of human rights protectors was held – the first international conference in the post-Soviet period. It was held in Leningrad Palace of Culture⁴, and the organizers were human rights activists – Polish «Solidarity» and our «Democratic Alliance». Human rights activists from around the world were visiting, it was a great event. I was invited to the organizing committee because by that time I've been actively working in the People's Front for several years.

At that time we outlined several areas where it was necessary to help people... E.g., miners – they attempted to protect their rights and to organize their own independent trade unions of miners (by the way, such truly independent unions still do not exist). It was relevant child protection theme, for those who fled from orphanages as lots of them were on the streets...There were «hot spots». And the question of release of political prisoners.. So, even on the surface there were important areas but such areas as army and recruits conscripts were not seen. Later, when we started to work, I began to understand why. We saw how huge and terrible the problem is, how people used to be afraid of it, afraid even of the issue itself. A single resistance occurred was toughly suppressed. I remember a boy ran away from military unit in Gatchina because of being beaten, returned home, the military came there to take him back and as I was told by the parents that they, in front of all the neighbors, dragged him down the stairs with his hair grabbed. Cruelty was incredible. But at the same time, lots of guys still kept fleeing from military units.

Then, at that conference of human rights activists one mother, who herself lost her son in the army gave a speech...she was from Chelyabinsk, I do not know what's her fate nowadays but at that hungry time the Ministry of Defence invited her to Moscow. Settled in the hotel, gave a ministerial ration made her some kind of representative...political department was giving her lists, and she sent out telegrams, convened people who lost their sons. This telegram was something like – put on a black dress, take a portrait of his son, come to Moscow. And the people were in grief,

⁴ Palace (House) of Culture – club-type organizations intended for promoting leisure activities among citizens. These organizations were majorly established in the USSR in 1920s.

people kept hoping...There was Afghanistan⁵, at the time, all this horror...People hoped to find at least some justice in Moscow. They arrived, settled in the hotel, it was a luxury for them. And then they were commanded by the military to, let's say, go starve or arrange pickets. In general, there was organized some kind of a screen from human misery. I did not realize it then, but when we have a conference in 1990 I helped her break through to the microphone and speak. And when she told her story, of her son's killing, it was a shock. After that she was invited to Moscow for the soviet MP convention...

– *And how did you approach the army, soldiers directly?*

– We were actively organizing its activities in the People's Front and tried to deal with problems plus we organized a lot of things – rallies, pickets, actions, filing telegrams, handed out a lot of literature...and the soldiers approached us. We talked to them. And then I even already accompanied them home...And one day there was a story with one already familiar to us soldier by the name of Sasha – he served in the Mikhailovskaya Academy near the Finlandskiy Railway Station – and suddenly on the answering machine at my house a message was left that he was arrested. I did not know where he was so I rushed to the Academy and at the Command checkpoint guys quietly passed me a note that he was in special prison for soldiers – on Sadovaya Street, at the commandant's office. I ran there and at that time everyone – the communists, the military and the police (militia) were different – they had no idea that someone could come up and demand them for something – I flew freely into the commandant's office and went straight to the 2nd floor. There was a soldier, young boy. I approached him, and he also was not prepared for a situation like this...He opened the registering journal. And there I see the name of that soldier as a prisoner. And at the same time, we conducted elections. And I was assistant deputy in Frunzenskiy district, a lot of people resided there who later became well-known MPs – Nikolai Arzhannikov, Igor Kucherenko,...Arzhannikov as a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, was also a member of its Military Council. I called him and asked him to come by that office... He arrived. That's how our active actions allowed pulling the guy out.

That's when I first saw this problem clearly. And then Sasha wrote an application to join the Democratic Alliance (Democratic Union)...And at first I called them back. And it turned out that they are not interested, they say there are not interested in such private matters. I'm calling several Committees of Soldiers' Mothers that existed in the city at that time under different names – in the House of officers, at the «Smena» newspaper – and they, too, could not do anything. It was then when I realized that no one can, no one is engaged for the rights of conscripts, and nobody wants to deal with this boy. Later I understood that all these committees – none of them dealt with individuals. They talked about the problem, which was also very important, but no one could really help...

⁵ The war in Afghanistan – 1979-1989 years.

In August 1991 there was a SCSE⁶ coup (coup d'état, putsch) in August, 1991. We immediately went to Mariinsky Palace⁷, city MPs gathered for an extraordinary session, organize a headquarters defense. The square in front of the palace was crowded with people and cars. We organized phone lines, journalists were good at that time. The first thing that people heard was – «Hand over all radios!!! Everybody back to work! Hand over all copying equipment!!!», and people reacted the other way around. Delivered copiers through windows. We went to the factories to distribute leaflets. Moved round the city with megaphones, together with journalists...explaining and informing of what was happening . ***Then we saw that people when hurt are capable of much, can be a real active force.***

Before August, 1991, as I said, we in the People's Front were engaged in the problems of «hot spots». Then there were events in Tbilisi in 1989⁸ , Baku⁹, there was a war in Karabakh, war in Abkhazia¹⁰ ...We have organized Karabakh support Committee. Then I went there. A plane of activists and journalists. We flew from Chkalovsky in Yerevan, then on a helicopter – to Karabakh, where, in fact, ***I saw the situation with soldiers in reality.***

There, on the main square of Stepanakert, two buildings – the former Executive Committee and former City Party Committee are situated. Around the City Party Committee – sandbags. And soldiers at a loss who protect it, abandoned by everyone with no understanding of the situation, while near the Executive Committee – enemies, militants. The militants were called those people who...at the very beginning stated their peaceful desires, referendum was held...Right next to this was a military prosecutor building. And then suddenly for the first time in such a situation IDF began to be used, i.e. weapons of mass destruction. And then the planes were flying. We invited the military commander to talk, asked – whose aircraft it? Whose hail of fire? Unidentified.

So two sides were given the weapon to fuel the conflict. That's when I looked at how people are helpless in this kind of situations. Directly on the site I saw the role of the military prosecutor's office, there, on the spot. There we came under fire, and I

⁶ State Committee on the State of Emergency, the self-proclaimed authority in the USSR, which existed from 18 to 21 August 1991 (the so-called «August Putsch»). Government officials and Soviet praitelstva persons has been established to counter the Soviet President Gorbachev reforms Gorbachev.

⁷ City Parliament was working in Mariinsky Palace on St. Isaac's Square in Leningrad.

⁸ Special operation to disperse opposition rally in front of the Government House of Georgian SSR in Tbilisi, carried out on the night of April, 9, 1989 with combined the forces of the internal troops and the Soviet army causing many casualties.

⁹ On January, 17 Armenian pogroms, massacres began in Baku as a result of which dozens of people were killed. Hundreds of Baku Armenians left the capital of the republic those days. On January, 18th a general strike started. At night January, 19 to 20 under the orders of Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov troops were introduced to Baku. The operations involved USSR major ground troops, naval, air forces and airborne troops as well as special forces of the KGB and the USSR Interior Ministry. Along their way armored column came under fire, and retaliatory military used firearm.

¹⁰ We are talking about an armed Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in 1992-1993.

myself experienced what the war brings to people. When we got into the helicopter, the refugees rushed to it...We came back with the children in our arms, and at this time the helicopter shelled. So I sipped it fully, this manmade war...And then there was such an important case associated with Stepanakert. . The representatives of the Armenian Diaspora addressed us, the People's Front, bringing parents of soldiers who were from Syktyvkar sent to Stepanakert. And there was a such a story – soldiers got into a fight with the locals. They returned to the barracks, then came the local police, they were arrested, put to the commandant's office. And they were approached with «interesting» suggestions – here's the address of rich Armenians – arrest them, bring him. Soldiers were confused, they did not know what to do. Regiment had already left. And the soldiers were left behind. And then they turned to the so-called rebels. They were given a small tape recorder and recorded all of these proposals. So they got their hands on the irrefutable evidences. Then these soldiers were flown to Yerevan. And from the point of view of the military they become deserters. There they gave a press conference and were sent to Leningrad. They came to us, the People's Front. And, of course, I do not know how to defend them but by the time we were in a process of opening our organization and then we went to the county prosecutor and made unprecedented case looking from nowadays – explained the situation to him, and a criminal case was transferred to Leningrad. And since it was rather artificial, it got quickly closed. ***It was one of the first victories, first in the history of our organization, our first experience of that kind.***

In January 1991 there were the events in Pribaltika (Baltic States)¹¹, in Vilnius, the seizure of the television station. I was an active participant in those events. In our Lensovet¹² there was pro-democratic Petr Filippov, member of the Supreme Council (Soviet) and Leningrad parliament. It was his office where we organized headquarters and contact point for connecting parliaments of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Leningrad and Moscow. We called the public when the tanks approached Vilnius at night. In Soviet Union there was no adequate information about what is happening, from the TV propaganda was pouring, the main idea of which was that «the Nazis took power». And we had no contact with soldiers who were in Vilnius.

We were trying to distribute the information over Leningrad, drove the Baltic newspapers around, and once with Julia Kondratieva¹³ organized a picket in front of

¹¹ January, 13, 1991. The capital of Lithuania, Vilnius city, was blocked by tanks and armored vehicles during the violent suppression of supporters of state independence. The situation in the city was so tense that at any moment a catastrophic explosion could occur. The building of the Supreme Council (Soviet) windows were in sandbags. 100 thousands on the square. And the tragedy occurred. When trying to assault a Vilnius television tower and TV center building by the Soviet military 14 people were killed. January, 13th, 1991 events in Lithuania found a ready response among the Russian public. In Moscow, January 20 a rally in support of Lithuania was held, the Leningrad City Council condemned the actions of the Soviet troops.

¹² Leningrad City Parliament.

¹³ Assistant deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Y.Boldyreva.

the Kazan Cathedral. It was after the events of January, 13th, the tanks gone through, people died already... We took a Lithuanian flag, handed out the newspapers, talked to passers-by, we talked about the situation. We began to offer them to write letters to their soldiers not to kill innocent people in Lithuania. People agreed. Letters were very good. We made copies of them in Vilnius Parliament... but the Lithuanians themselves decided not to distribute them to the soldiers.

We said – well, let's do it ourselves. Julia and I were only able to be brought to the military green town and were told that they are afraid to continue, and we went to the checkpoint. On the walls there are inscriptions: «Stop! I'll shoot!». The soldiers were mostly from Central Asia. Poorly understanding Russian language; Of course, it was made on purpose. An officer on duty approached us. And he didn't understand anything. What ladies, what do they want... But we were persistent and persuaded to take us to command. Arrived there and told we were from Leningrad, amazed by this situation, we do not want people to kill each other, we had brought letters from Leningrad. They listened in amazement, but took the letters... They did not know how to get rid of us, gave an accompanying officer, we walked and talked with the officer, I look around – tanks are everywhere... And all this in a peaceful city. And the officer himself is from Belarus. He said they had no information about what is happening in Lithuania. They were only shown a film that fascists captured the city. Going out into the streets, they were very much afraid. And, too, they were afraid of the Lithuanians. And this gap has been very dangerous. It turned out, that we were like some kind of bridge. I do not know what the fate of these letters, but ***this visit greatly influenced me. We first got into the military unit – they were always closed in the USSR, like the district committees of the party.***

– *In other words, you realized that the people themselves can solve the problem?*

– Yes, gradually. We then went with Julia from the military city, to the TV tower, where people died. I looked around in horror and then I had the same feeling like when I was in Grozny – the ruined city, you go and have no idea where you are: TV tower stands, and around it – armored vehicles ...and crowds of people, people pray, come with flowers. Many people with bruises under their eyes – they got covered by a sound wave, when the heavy tanks were in the city... window, large, glassed with an armed soldier sitting behind it. I knocked on the window, opened it, told I'm from Leningrad, here're cigarettes, newspapers, started talking to him. He begins to answer. Then suddenly jumps out, apparently the officer without insignia, grabs that boy and drags away. The window closes, another soldier comes and spikes the window crosswise. And as we leave, I look up and see (there are large windows, cape tight) that someone opened the edge of the cape, and waved his hand to us. That is, when I got a complete picture. It was ***then when I began to realize who it is – a soldier in the army. Disenfranchised screw, but with a gun.***

And ***I realized how important it is to solve the problem of demilitarization of the country to change something.*** We, citizens, we have already seen how to live,

where to go. And there – a different system, and it drags us back into the past. And it needs to be changed. ***And then we set up the organization.***

For taking part in the January events, the Lithuanian government awarded Lithuanian citizens and 42 representatives of foreign countries, including several Russians, who have distinguished themselves in the defense of freedom and independence of Lithuania commemorative medal «January, 13», and good to know that I was one of them. Medal – very much in the spirit of the event – is a modest, but filled with great meaning, dignity. The medal depicts Nike the goddess supporting wounded. At the reverse side – the word LITHUANIA is written in large letters, and below «were, are and will be». So brief and so deep, meaningful... Those events, and this medal – as the memory of the feeling of need for freedom, which Vilnius air was saturated with. It was in the air infecting us. And there, ***perhaps, was found and then grew stronger over the years, a sense of absolute certainty that victory is possible, people are strong when united, and when they realize the price of freedom and dignity. And it has also formed the idea of the mission of our organization.***

Later the Moscow Helsinki Group and independent military conducted an investigation in the wake of Vilnius events. No one knew how it happened, why people were killed there. And when the investigation revealed that the soldiers were not armed, and behind them, behind their backs, stood a group of Alpha. In other words, the army was set up. Then it turned out that the participants in these events is the Pskov Division. Then we decided to see – what kind of people, how they live. We decided that the Lithuanian journalist will go from Lithuania, and we – from Leningrad .

In Pskov we went to a wounded officer in the military hospital. We knew his name. He was a young, good-looking officer, he graduated from the Ryazan Airborne School (airborne troops). Uncomfortable questions, such as «why you took the media center (Dom Pechati)?» baffled him. He is a military man, he had a family. He said it was an order. And we again: «Why?». This «why» is the question that people in uniform are not accustomed to thinking... And then we went to the dormitory where families of these officers live. And when we entered the building, we were greeted by weeping wives, who said – look at how we live. These are intolerable conditions. You can imagine – they were moved from Baikonur, the promises were not fulfilled. They have repaired former toilet, and began to live there: toilet had window, bed, right there they cook, their belongings, two children and a husband and wife – a terrible situation. As for men – they are exhausted, they get promises, for a whole day are on the range, and when they return there's their weeping wife problems. So ***I saw the real situation in the army. I realized that no one cares at all about all this problems...***

That's why when in September 1991 after the coup (putsch) Congress of Soldier's Mothers was organized in Moscow I was called and invited – so we went. There was enough to discuss and propose. Vladimir Alekseev, one of the founders of our organization, was among its participants of this Congress.

– *The organization «Soldier's Mothers» originally appeared as people united by the idea or brought together by their personal stories?*

– There were people with their heavy sorrows and stories that made them address the problems of servicemen's rights seriously and there were concerned people who responded to the challenge, and there were just motivated people acting consciously, deliberately, like me, for example.

Congress in Moscow also gave me a lot, because I could see what is the Committee of Soldier's Mothers. When we arrived by the invitation of the Congress, I was naive to say the representative of the women – organizers that it would be necessary to do this and that. She replied that she cannot do anything special. And it became clear that possibilities of this remarkable initiative equaled zero. And the whole room was full of people, a lot of the guys from the army came as well as parents who brought their children, many parents of the dead.

And then they offered – let's go to the Kremlin, to Gorbachev and talk. So they gathered this whole Congress, with the portraits of the children, and we all went with a march over Moscow to the Kremlin. Near the History Museum we were greeted by a military band, and with the orchestra went through Red Square. Then, out of all the parents we have identified 17 people who went to the president and I said – I will not go, I have nothing to say to him. People stayed here. I then organized several of them, made bring us a megaphone and began to offer everyone to speak up. And people began to tell their stories, scary, horror stories. It was some kind of vent, hope for them...But I, when they listened, I realized that everything is meaningless...Nothing can be changed this way.

– *There were people whose children have died in Russia or in hot spots, where...*

– Altogether – in that spots, in Afghanistan, and at Baikonur¹⁴, everywhere... Back then I returned to Leningrad, and announced on the radio that we created an initiative group. 10 people gathered at the Mariinsky Palace and agreed to act, decide to carry out the founding congress...Held Congress, and momentarily the newspaper «Defending the Motherland» published an article «Mothers under the black flag». Why? It's because the anarchists with black flags came to the Congress. But there were also military, doctors, so many different people came to the Congress. And there we decided to establish a new organization, discussed what kind of organization we want: do not want to be depending on any committee, we want to be an organization of the people. And Nonna E. Bogdanova¹⁵ while being there drew the first emblem of the organization. Female hand. Tunnel. Candle. Shine. The life of a son...

¹⁴ Baikonur is the world's first and largest cosmodrome. City Baikonur and Baikonur cosmodrome together form a complex «Baikonur», leased by Russia from Kazakhstan for the period up to 2050.

¹⁵ One of the founders of the organization.



So we applied for the establishment of the organization. We had to find a place for receiving people. We came to Izmailovsky pr. 8 – there was a space given by former district party committee for public organizations. A commandant told us directly – who are you? There are lots like you...We then turned around and left. But I was stopped by Vitaliy Savitsky. He was an MP. He died later. At that time he organized the Christian Democratic Party and he had a big room. He says: «We'll give you a corner here to work». And we have given over the radio announcement that we conduct reception. I remember the feeling of my first days – some unconscious feeling – I was squeezed into a corner by crowd of people with problems. I do not understand what to do, there was almost no experience...And also came a colonel immediately sent from his headquarters to ask who we are and what we are doing. Just such an avalanche covered...

– But you still have started to work?

Yes. And we began to receive visitors there. Entries in the log, it is also necessary to listen to the person – we started to understand it. Worked after our main work on weekends. It is necessary to make entries in a log, listen to the people. At the same room there was an organization called «Shield». Soon it turned out that these people stopped those who came to us with problems at the entrance, offered to give up Soviet citizenship, guys signed some statement...and it these guys later turned out in Transnistria and other «Hot spots». So, it was recruiting under cover. Once we found out about it – we left immediately. And then the Republican Party, they gave us a small room, desk, telephone (if we did not have to pay for it) – and that's it. That's all we had. Then we began to bring stuff back from own homes...Typewriters...And I remember these moments – the door opens, someone puts the typewriter (at that same time it was a great value) and leaves and the door closes...That was a special time with special people. That's the way we were then with bare hands, almost with nothing...But what it already gave us – we could be together. Discuss **together**. Think together. Cry together.

The experience accumulated gradually. And in the process, we ***have seen that there are many similar problems.*** I must say that there was absolutely no practice on defending recruits. We began to get into laws...In 1993 a constitution appeared, the Act on universal conscription was abolished, a new law came to life. Diseases directory has always been kept secret classified as «For Official Use Only». And this – the worst when sick children get drafted into the army. At that moment, Baltic mothers, the Latvian – they took two bottles of cognac, came to some recruiting office and got books for 2 hours with diseases directory. It were 4 books with completely blind text. And in 2 hours they had it all reprinted on typewriters. That was an incredible achievement! And the first time we got the Disease register and the first thing done – hung it at the entrance to our room. Coming after some time out of the room, I saw a lot of people in every way contrived rewriting these diseases...After some more time I realized that I can write a sample application that people could fill in. I hung up the sample in the hallway. And some people began to appear who came to explore what is it and how...That is ***when trust gradually began to arise.***

– And who showed more interest?

– First, mothers, more rarely – fathers. Then I realized that it is necessary to unite the people that they were together helping each other. And I must say it was a success. Gradually people were able to act. E.g., there was an incident with a disabled mom from Baltiysk and her son had problems in the army. She realized that there is no other option but to pull him out of there. So she brought her son and 5 other children...I say, «How did you manage? How did you do it? «It turned out that along with the conductors, they hid and driven those guys on the third shelf in train cars. She had nothing. Only will and desire to save his son. Gradually, we began to go to the format of the meeting, to discuss problems with people. As many people were jammed into this little room, we started to rent the auditorium for money. It was jammed.

After some time, I spoke at some conference about the way we work. And I was approached by the Soros Foundation representative who asked how we lived, what grants we had. Grants? I did not even hear anything about them, I did not understand what it is. In addition, there was some kind of pride – imagining myself asking for money somewhere? We are doing such an important thing. Even later when they even offered to write an application I reacted the same way. But Soros Foundation, seeming to understand the situation, suddenly gave us free hardware equipment. It was a computer without the software, a fax and, most importantly, a Xerox. We had to copy documents and it was necessary to help people. In general, ***it was such a big leap.***

And then Russian-German exchange began to operate. They offered to help us write an application to TASIS. We filed an application to TASIS where I proposed to plan a budget so that it: a) had some aid for the organization; b) included an opportunity for five European volunteers; c) included funds for trips to Europe to talk about army problems, d) had funding to prepare a report, e) provided part of funds for the «Memorial» human rights center. Russian-German exchange helped us all realize

this and organize international cooperation...There was Maria, from Austria. She helped us write an application. And this grant allowed us not to come after our main work and do something, but to have a fully professional job. That's how the «Soldier's Mothers of Saint-Petersburg» made a huge step forward.

At that point we came to the conclusion that it is not necessary to keep a journal while it is necessary to give the people to fill the questionnaires by themselves... We also ***began to publish our first very thin pamphlets on the Rights of the recruit, on health protection.*** Published a collection of application samples. It got widely popular. The project was very successful.

While in the EU existed such a practice: some European organization was given a grant, and we acted as accomplices. And suddenly, for the first time(!), they gave us a grant directly. But why did that happen? Once I got a call from Vitaliy Savitsky who said that the large international delegation is planning a visit and offered to come and talk about our work. And I answered: «No, let them come to us, look with their own eyes, meet people...» And then Marie Lenz, Member of the European Parliament came – she was on the Commission for Human Rights of the European Parliament in Brussels. Marie spent many hours with us. We invited children who were tortured in the army, witnesses. Showed their statements. She gathered all the materials, took it with her and for the first time made a report to the European Parliament: «Status of new recruits». It was a shock. She afterwards told she could not explain to MPs what all these abuses, tortures are for. Thus, the European Parliament got an understanding we are doing something really important.

Also we started to use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I then realized that people do not know the Constitution, laws...That was our task – to make sure that they are aware of their fundamental rights to feel that their dignity is valuable, that everyone has a civic responsibility...And we began to educate people.

But soon to all those unresolved issues Chechnya added¹⁶. Chechnya is a scandalous example of serious violations of human rights in the army. And when it has happened we were hit a flurry of calls! About 200+ people came every day...They were shocked, angered. We had to organize them somehow.

Most of them were parents, relatives of soldiers. And then there were provocateurs, there were «activists» any who tried to do something...they had to be fought off. People had to be given a chance to talk, tell their history. To get calmed if and when it is possible.

We carried out an investigation in Kamenka with journalist Pavel Lobkov from NTV channel... We did not know anything. With no access to military cities (camps). We did not have any accurate information. And there were sending troops from Kamenka... That's how I learned about Chechnya. I was in the office one evening. A boy called:

¹⁶ It was a period of the first Chechen war (1994-1996) – officially called «Restoring constitutional order in the Republic of Chechnya» and the Second Chechen War (1999–2001) – official name «counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus (CTO)».

«You helped us once...my friend came from Kamenka. He says terrible things...» I offered them to come. They came and that friend told very strange things happening there. Kids were gathered – a few people from different units. Transported from one unit to another and finally to Kamenka. And there were 2 peacekeeping battalions in Kamenka, which according to the law were eligible to participate in the peacekeeping mission in South Ossetia. And before the war began they started to bring children from the other units. This friend of a boy who called was the one who ran away: they were moved from Ladoga to Kamenka, dressed in a different uniform, given papers written in pencil. He realized they were going to be sent somewhere and ran away...That's how the personnel was sent to Chechnya. There, in those battalions with lists written in pencil, copying guys documents, removed peace signs from the uniform and were sent on a plane or a train. They said something about destination, such as the virgin lands, or somewhere out there...and to Chechnya .. He escaped, told us so we knew there was something being prepared. And when I got a call from Pavel Lobkov «let's go, find out» – we went there. We did not know exactly where to go. There was no experience. Just down the tank tracks we arrived to the unit. We saw that at the checkpoint some people were gathered – with chicken, thermoses – and fed their children. At the same time everyone knew what was going on in Grozny, how many soldiers already died. We talked to them to take their sons away! «Take them out of here!» You do not have to send them to death! But they brushed us aside like we were flies.

Then I remembered a short story from my youth. We went with whole families in canoe trips. And in one campaign, on the Volga River, heard a terrifying sound. We all ran and saw a fallen tree, and below it there was a snake in front of all screaming frogs. And before our eyes the snake caught one and began to swallow. Swallowed – and then the next frog jumped right into her mouth. The queue is moving forward and continues to scream in horror...

And remembering it, looking at these parents at the checkpoint, I thought these people will never be free, never knew what it is like to feel free...

But I knew there was a resource and it's essential to turn it on. That's why the main thing is educating people. People need to be shown, explained, persuaded, proved...

I was convinced again it's the right thing back in 1998 when I was invited to Paris for the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. There was a big celebration human rights defenders from around the world got together. At the Palais de Chaillot Eleanor Roosevelt granddaughter told how the declaration was created and how difficult it was to force officials admit that the person is more important than authorities. There was a review of human rights around the world. I learned about horrors occurring in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and that still human rights defenders work there. And it was a shame for us. I realized that we can work well in Russia. Of course, one should not expect quick results, but the process, movement is important. ***It was also a strong incentive to take a fresh look at our work.*** And we began to focus more precisely on the educational program.

And by that time American Christians gave us the whole car full of Bible copies. They were in black calico, simple books...There were whole shelves of Bible copies. People came to us and complained in despair that they were cheated, everything taken away from them, and now their son was taken. They were in shock. And then they...We copied Chechnya map. Learned ourselves as we were not familiar with Chechens. In this Bible we put a piece of paper with the map and gave them saying «Go, save your sons!».

And the people began to go straight there, to the war and began to bring their kids, save them. And then I decided to go, look, explore. Then some other parents arrived, there were a few stories. One story – dad came, with all the documents that his boy has a cancer while he was in a unit. He had to be transferred to the reserve and returned home. Instead, he was sent to the war. On another day a lady came and says that her son served in South Ossetia. And it had to be demobilized and return home but instead he was sent to Chechnya. None of it has been reported but the journalists called her and said they saw her son there. And then I, along with these parents bought a plane ticket, and we flew there. We arrived to Mineralnye Vody city, rent a car. And then with the Chechens – well, there was no fear. We split up, because that dad at some time found out where his son was – in Vladikavkaz and there was the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, and he seemed to be stuck there...So he had to travel to Vladikavkaz, and we went to Nazran, Ingushetia. And when we arrived, we found one basement near Aushev's Presidential Palace and Aushev helped a lot, and next to the palace was a plant and there, in the basement, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers was situated. And very important information flowed to this Committee – journalists came from everywhere and...where could they go? To the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. Also there were parents who were looking for their sons. Where else could they go? The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. And when I got there, I tried to arrange to bring these two streams together.

And next morning together with this woman, Galya, we went to the press center organized in Nazran. I remember myself standing in the press center, telling her the story, that she needs help, that her boy was seen in Starye Atagi. We wrote a note to the headman of the Starye Atagi village asking him to help. And suddenly I heard a snuffle. I turn – and see her in tears. It turns out that there were Chechens or Ingush, I do not know, and when they heard the story they simply began to give her money. Then I got called by the guys from «Komsomolskaya Pravda» newspaper that their car is going to Starye Atagi but there is only one place. She went, and I returned to St. Petersburg. After some time we met and Galia told the story that she couldn't find her son in Starye Atagi and moved to the city of Mozdok. At that time parents who hoped to receive any information from the military about their children went to Mozdok. Again some journalists called that they have seen her son. She then she went right to Grozny at war, and all she had was a mother handkerchief. And she just asked the Chechen children – do you know him? And she went with them. And she describes –

imagine walking down the street, around the ruins, with no idea where they take me...And suddenly I see – here goes my son, in a leather jacket, with two guys next to him. The story was that this kids were transferred from Ossetia to Chechnya and thrown into battle. And in this battle Galya's son was immediately wounded. Everyone was gone, he was left there. And Chechen civilians, dragged him into the house and rendered medical assistance. Then came the so-called rebels and said – did you killed ours? He says – I did not have time. – Then go back. He said – I can not.

A mistress – mother whose eldest son was killed by the federal forces (the «feds»), she says – stay, be my adopted son. But this woman knew that somewhere his true mother was suffering and then children began to bring him to Starye Atagi showing reporters that here he is.

When Galya came to Grozny, before February 23 everyone were all afraid expecting something terrible would happen. And Chechen family issued the boy's documents that he was a refugee Chechen. And as soon as there was a mother, she immediately took him and returned home. That was such a beautiful story in all aspects – just for a movie...The story which shows that still there are some universal values stronger than war...

But the father, who went for his son, said that when he came and laid out the documents showing that's what kind of a boy you took. And military had nothing to say. Both father and son also returned. There were so many stories that time... Chechnya is generally a mass of stories, trips, rescue, meetings, tragedy, grief, accompanied «cargo 200»¹⁷ and communications with rebels...And there was no place for fear. Only a great desire to save, to help, to do something...Our life was made of these living stories, we became stronger, gained experience, courage, confidence...

– *What did Chechnya give you as a organization leader?*

Fearlessness. And some inner strength, some autopilot. The totalitarian system feeds on fear of people, namely courage can disarm it. I realized the limit of my fear in 1991 when the miners invited us to the Congress in the Donbass. We said that we wanted to go down into the mine. It is clear that the mine was not deep, indicative – but we have enough. Later, when you get down there, you still need to crawl through the narrow roadway. This hole in the ground, 50 cm in diameter. We crawl...This drift is hell. The temperature of 40 degrees, dust is such that nothing can be seen, only the whites in the eyes...There I realized that there can be nothing to be afraid of. We are already at the bottom of the abyss, and there will be no worse.

¹⁷ Cargo 200 – is a conventional coded designation used in the Russian Federation Armed Forces for those who died and in process air transportation of the body.



There is another important story about Chechnya connected to the organization development.

We had a congress in Moscow, it gathered representatives of the Committees of Soldier's Mothers from across the country, activists, Buddhists...We decided to organize the «March of maternal compassion». We decided to go on the route Moscow-Smolensk to the south. Along the hospitals with wounded. And enter Grozny. And then someone spoke and said that there is such a nice ritual in the Caucasus: when two fight, the woman throws white handkerchief at their feet – they diverge...So we decided to hold a rally «White handkerchiefs» in each city we came through. The march began from the Kremlin. And I came to this march in Nazran .. many buses then came from Chechnya. To guide us. And we drove up to the checkpoint. We were delivered through Sernovodsk. We spent nights in the Chechen homes. Then went to the village of Samashki. Then just shortly in Samashki some well known terrible events took place. I also had an extra mission commissioned by St. Petersburg journalists. Our two journalists Felix Titov and Maxim Shabalin were lost there... From «Nevskoe Vremya» newspaper.

I had their portraits and tried to gather information when possible where they were...We were walking out of Sernovodsk to Samashki and I just saw – along the road – there is the corpse of an animal and some strange bags lie...it turned out that helicopters fly and shell the village...and when we entered the village of Samashki people ran to us immediately, bringing bread...we, they said, are waiting for you, you have to stop the war...We developed a nonviolence declaration for the march: we go to the war zone, trying to express thoughts, «throw white handkerchiefs», take responsibility, and will not meet violence with strength...I had brought there our poster, «Thou shalt not kill». We approached the checkpoint, were stopped, then we declared their appeal...the military was led to shock .. They did not know what to do with us let us pass. And since these journalists were last seen at the village of Achkhoy-Martan, we went there. There, before Achhoy -Martan our whole column a lot of cars, buses was stopped, detained, surrounded by a chain of soldiers, among whom were «Alfa»¹⁸... Just in 50 meters there were Chechens, on the other hand – Achkhoy-Martan. They brought food, kept waiting for us. Soldiers were put in our buses and driven them to the field. And there was a huge field...Some heavy tanks stood there, the officer sat drunk in the APC. I came up to him...The negotiations lasted for hours. He was ordered not to let us in. And then I just took the Chechen bread and began to go through soldiers...Guys? What are you doing here? What for? – Some of the soldiers started to cry...others stood stone-faced. Several people ran over to the Chechens. As time went on...I was with this poster. When it got dark, these tanks opened fire on the village...

¹⁸ «Alfa» («Alfovtsy») were called fighters of a special unit of the Center Special Purpose of Federal Security Service, formed in 1974 in the Soviet Union and continuing its activities in Russia. Special division designed to carry out counter-terrorism special operations.

And we had a lot of journalists – ours, foreign. The logic was this – they shoot, Chechens respond back from the village. Thus, we could get shot as we were on the line of fire between the two sides and it will be possible to say – these are the beasts...the militants, rebels. It was very cold. And such a firecracker from these rockets! Journalists managed to quickly shoot all this, went to Nazran and quickly transferred for the whole world to see. Sent those pictures. Apparently, when they saw it the shooting stopped. Forced us with guns to our buses, Chechen drivers were taken...And before that, I noticed, some very large trucks passed by with people in them. Apparently, watching who the instigators were...Buddhists, who were with us were beating drums. Drums supported us. Because it was a whole day...in all this constant voltage. There was no fatigue, however. So our Buddhists in bright yellow clothes as rags were thrown in the trucks and taken away. We – on the bus, and the column were moving back, do not know where...And not down the road, but by tank trails...The bus got stuck in a hole, we were taken out, a tank pulled the bus and we went on...the drivers were soldiers. And we saw we left Chechnya and found ourselves on the territory of Ingushetia. The bus stopped...We just rushed out. We are already in Ingushetia – do what you want. And here's a very funny situation. It's dark...there are those buses. Columns of APCs accompanying...And I come to this APC, there is still the same drunken officer...he didn't get out being afraid. We went to a checkpoint and began to call President of Ingushetia Palace to tell what happened to us and ask for help to come to the aid. Suddenly we see – the lights are bright, column sweeps for us from Chechnya...Well, I thought – that's it! We're done. Something's going to happen. It turned out a few armored vehicles with soldiers rushed to help us...We say «Guys, do not!» They answer «No, you are in danger here!» Barely stopped them. We asked them «get back, we're going to be okay»...and you, above all, do not kill anyone, and return home alive». When everything was finally over, our column was brought to Nazran, where we spent the night...we started to call, tell what happened. The next day, prosecutors came to us to get the information of what happened. Chechen drivers were taken by the army, but with the Buddhists one our guy from Yekaterinburg was taken...They were interrogated, then put on a plane and taken away. And our goal was – to rescue them and drivers. In general, there was a whole story...and that this march gave me a lot. When I came back, I already had a completely different vision of the situation. ***There was a force already.*** So here, when we were forced to move out of Izmailovsky 8 building, we were able to defend our interests: gathered petitions, organized people...From the city government in the Smolny¹⁹ called immediately–What are you doing? Let's negotiate. Our answer was – Let's! They began to offer different facilities and, finally, our current one on Razyezzhaya 9 – gave us completely destroyed. We ourselves brought it to order. And here is where we live and work all these years...

¹⁹ Historic buildings. In Leningrad / St. Petersburg the City Government is located there.

– And who was in the organization at the moment?

The organization consisted of enthusiasts, someone was there, on the basis of ideas, as me, for example. Someone – having gone through some sort of a stories, someone simply imbued with the exigencies of the problem...Who was with us then? Vladimir Alekseev – he survived the hardest story, saved his son, knew it all himself. Very motivated person. Active supporter of the creation of such an organization. Alexandra M. Shinkarenko – an old lady who saved her grandson. School deputy director. Communist. Navigator during the war. She was all a person of that system...But after going through all the ordeal with her grandson got so imbued that she stayed with us, began to help very actively, carrying out the School of Human Rights which we organized right away, to tell, convince...Zoe F. Kulakova, volunteer – back at Izmailovskiy 8 came to us someday, looked around, listened – and stayed...worked as a tutor in the kindergarten before. Handled moms as children here...We've got mothers arrived from different places of our country, who lived for months, sleeping on the chairs in the hall waiting until the fate of the children is decided...Baikov-Helmi family and her son Kolya...doctor, midwife. She explained a lot to us. For example, connection between categories and childbirth. Elena Vilenskaya – also came and worked led by her own thoughts. We also had a great lawyer – Lena Filonova. She addressed for counseling, attended a session of the School of Human Rights, and suddenly said: «I will work with you!». So she was filled with what she saw and heard here. We always had a lot of volunteers. Among them there are many from Europe. European Commission grants gave an opportunity to invite 5 people. And they were working for six months – making article, working. And so the information was spreading. Students from Cambridge wrote the work with us in the newspaper, and others began to come because of that. Also some came from Zurich University, the International Red Cross. The Americans, Canadians. And worked along with us. On equal terms. They became experts in the field in Europe and other countries. There was, for example, one German guy. He came on the European Commission grant. He said – you know, I know nothing... I just know how to play a violin. I said – «Excellent! Play!». And I remember – a full house of people in the office at Izmailovsky. Full hall, and people who came with the trouble, came from different cities in the province. And that German starts playing. And I see: changing faces of these people. Lighter somehow. We were with on the same wave talking with them after that. Somehow he lifted people souls...There was a Belgian, Hendrik. He was sitting with us here in the room. Helping with everything he could. Making tea, copying papers, delivering something somewhere. He said – I'm not an expert, do not know how else to help...I told him to sit, observe and describe what happens. And he wrote an interesting text. We had it published. Translated into Russian. «Soldier's Mothers of St. Petersburg» in the eyes of Europeans». And because of this we saw ourselves in other's view...

Then there was a generation of young guys-volunteers. There were some provocateurs among them too. There were different people...But then it was easy to identify, to debunk. Including during the School of Human Rights classes. As for key staff – the most part of them represented remarkable generation of the 60s...but not only them, and it is an amazing story when the severity of problem, its sharpness, its appalling visibility, constant interaction in order to help people – joined together different people for a very long time. Different views, attitudes, tastes, habits, beliefs – all them were outweighed by the need to act, to help, to save...And then over the years there was a heavy period. This generation began to leave, time began to change...The material factor appeared. Someone did not have enough strength, nerves to work in such suspense, to see people's every day troubles. Part of employees went to work in their own directions. It was a whole story...There was a crisis, but useful, because it gave an opportunity for others to open up. Work became different. Indeed, in the early years, we were automatically working as a complaints bureau. The professionalism increased. The other requirements to ourselves, to relation to the people started to rise. And then young employees began to appear, young guys – lawyers, psychologists.

– And what is the organization now?

Now it is a completely different team, of course. We began to work at a completely different level. We here and now make an application for a new image of civil society. After all, as soon as Russian citizens become active, critically-minded, knowing their basic constitutional rights, when will learn to take responsibility for themselves they will be able to fully control actions of the authorities. The state in a normal social system should be part of society and should be managed by it.

We have a great desire to make military institutions human and dignified. We believe that the time of the army, being the most important instrument of the state and at the same time, being that closed, distant from the public institutions – must end. The army must become a place where people are valued and respected.

– Do you see real results of your work, any changes?

First – it is living, rescued boys. But to pull them out of slavery – is one thing, to make them citizens – is quite another. Therefore, we do not expect quick results. They can not be achieved. Even education is complicated with corruption. People prefer to pay a bribe than to follow the path of upholding their rights. We used to have 200-300 people coming to our school, now it's 20-30. But this is a normal process – people themselves must decide what they need. And that minority which is already on the hard way – they are a pledge of future.

I think in many ways thanks to our work the word «deserter» was eliminated from being used. Boys, who leave units because of some problems are now more often referred to as «runners». In the Russian army there is such a thing as a single or mass escape from the army in the form of illegal abandonment of the military unit. This is one of the crimes stated in the Russian Federation Criminal Code (CC RF). It is not desertion, which is also a crime according to the Criminal Code, even though organization also

encountered the latter. Young men, escaped from his military unit, are technically considered as those who illegally left units. Their actions are considered as a crime with a misinterpretation of Article 337 of the Criminal Code, excluding notes. «Soldiers' Mothers» refuse to call these guys «deserters» or «criminals». We have always treated and treat them as fugitives («runners») because these young people are just defending their right for life, health and dignity. When recruit is beaten and exhausted, broken, it's not just his right, it is his duty to get away from those oppressors. Runners often come into the organization in a terrible physical and psychological condition. Sometimes they walk for days to reach here, suffering from cold, sleeping at night in the forest or in empty buildings. Here they have a first help: food, some clothes, washing facilities if necessary – are provided health care. «Runners» tend to experience severe psychological stress, especially during the period between the escape and the official proceedings. Parents are often overwhelmed by their problems, in own emotions, and therefore they do not always realize what their son had experienced in the army, how stressful it was. And therefore support of specialists is needed.

We began to make military units more open. The light that lights up in people when they are trying not to humiliate others, when they help the weaker it creates another space where people feel safe and begin to open up. Such places in Russia are in a very small amount but they exist. Now, unfortunately, the situation is changing, and the process is largely going in the opposite direction. But giving up is not an option.

The military staff already takes us into consideration. As before, there are some enemies, there are also active, but they are, in particular, forced to live and work in the new reality, respond to our presence. They do not shred away from us like flies, listen, and moreover sometimes very afraid of publicity and our response. And more increasingly often some managers have to call or come to us to coordinate positions.

I also consider it a great achievement that our words and deeds go hand in hand. During the totalitarian Soviet period people used to see leaders, organizations, including the public ones, saying one thing and doing another. In «Soldiers' Mothers» the words go along with actions. And it means a lot to people. Organization shows people how to get rid of fears that follow them and distort their reality. People want to be respected, and that is what they get in an organization. They learn to be a person that is valued and respected. This radically changes their minds.

It is also important that the organization entered with its representative to the Human Rights Council under the President of the Russian Federation. It is also a kind of recognition. It means a lot to people that there are recruits – winners, saved boys, «runners» – so the rumor, fame runs gets in front of us...And so people believe and come to us. We believe that the more people passed through us, through our human rights school, the greater the chance for conversion of cultural and social consciousness and, consequently, change for better. After all, only when our help is not needed anymore in a changed world and no one comes to the organization – only then «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» will be happy!

«SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG» – PUBLIC HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION



«Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is an organization that was created in 1991 by enthusiasts, who at the time realized that the army recruits and challenges to protect rights of future, current and former military personnel – need attention and assistance from society.

«Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is not some extraordinary service that you call for help. They are, figuratively speaking, «human rights» agents. They want people to know their rights and demand respect for these rights in practice. Only when society will act the same way, something can change for better.



Since 1991 the organization aims to protect legitimate rights of citizens called up for military service and alternative civilian service as well as military personnel, citizens during alternative civilian service and their families. The organization provides free legislative, legal and other social assistance and support to citizens, as well as monitoring violations of their rights and legal interests on the basis of appeals of citizens for further preparation of analytical reports and making them available for competent authorities concerned in the government, as well as international human rights protection institutions.



One of the main objectives of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» activity is to establish the rule of law while the principles proclaimed are commitment to the concept of human rights, responsibility and integrity, legitimacy of any form of activities and focus on the interaction with the authorities. It should be emphasized that in the work it is guided by the statement that one of the means to achieve the goal is the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» express their deep commitment to the fundamental freedoms that are the foundation of justice and peace in the world which is best achieved by common understanding and observance of human rights. Another important factor is the assertion that any citizens' rights stem from the inherent dignity of the human person.



Techniques for providing legal and social assistance to recruits, soldiers and their families, developed by the organization, are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Constitution of the Russian Federation. As its foundation «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» have ideas of Charter of Human Responsibilities²⁰ and the empowerment program – methodology in which citizens take responsibility for decisions at the level at which they operate. Today, in Russia the organization is one of a few working on the empowerment program. Employees of the organization are experts in the field of civil-military relations. As such, they are part of the Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights, the Human Rights Commission under the Governor of St. Petersburg, the Advisory Council under the Commissioner for Human Rights in St. Petersburg. Experts of the organization are involved in reception of citizens in cooperation with the Government of St. Petersburg, the Commissioner for Human Rights in St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg Military Commissariat. Organization of cooperation has been established with the military authorities, including the Western Military District in addressing specific issues on the appeals of citizens. Working effectively with agencies of the Military Prosecutor's Office, including the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office the Organization together with the Commissioner for Human Rights in St. Petersburg and the Ombudsman for Children published educational materials for the citizens. The organization is actively cooperating with the human rights group «Citizen. Army. Right», Youth Human Rights Movement, who have vast experience in civic education of young activists in various areas of human rights work in the format of the Moscow and St. Petersburg Open School of Human Rights, the Association for Medical Law, the «Civil control» organization, «Memorial», Moscow Helsinki group human rights organization and others.

²⁰ Approved at the World Assembly of Citizens, Lille - 2-10.12.2001.

«Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» are:

- *Legal education of citizens to legal mechanisms of their protection*
- *Legislative and legal support of recruits and youth of pre-recruit age*
- *Protecting rights of servicemen and their families*
- *Development of alternative civil service institute*
- *Fighting corruption in the armed forces*
- *Fighting torture and ill-treatment in the army*
- *Analytical work, independent reporting on human rights situation in the area of civil-military relations*
- *Working with socially vulnerable groups of society*
- *Hotline for protection of the rights of recruits and soldiers. Aimed for emergency calls from recruits, military staff and their relatives. Landline and mobile organizations' «hot line» take about 500 calls a month from recruits, soldiers and their relatives.*
- *Civilian control of the military departments and other government agencies staff responsible for work in recruiting to the armed forces. The organization also takes part in designing mechanisms for civil control organization over abiding laws in the Russian Federation Armed Forces, other military units and formations*

And now, after 25 years since its foundation, what do organization employees think about?

Ellа POLYAKOVA, chairman of the organization, working since 1991: «We started to work at a completely different level. People who currently work in our organization are different. They are motivated. They understand the meaning of what they do, where to go next. Especially against with the background of our confused society. In fact, we have grown the tree of the personalities who are able to lead the whole direction. We have a grown up team»

Alexander GORBACHEV, organization lawyer, working since 2012: «The primary function of the organization is, in my opinion, to assist in the creation of civil society, which is only possible with the helping people in finding their dignity as a human being and citizen. Finding dignity is inextricably linked to the dignity of the other person's perception, and therefore recognition of such values as tolerance, and with searching for appropriate solutions through dialogue rather than coercion. All this, in the end, should promote the establishment of a democratic state. And it is impossible without citizens. For me, the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is a

number of indifferent people. I began to work here because I was invited to try it by a former employee of the organization – Elena Popova. I decided to try, and then – got into it...Work in the organization definitely changed me. I was able to discover for myself and in me some new moral values, based on the principles of humanism and the rule of the human person through communication with many caring people».

Oksana PARAMONOVA, coordinator of recruits, coordinator of educational programs since 2004: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is a community of caring people which is constantly growing. I mean, it's not just those people who work full-time but also those who bear the idea of human rights, idea of responsibility, belief that you can change something. They followed this in their lives, or try to follow because the conditions are complicated, of course. So it is such a wide range of people.

Why did I start working in the organization? – First, immediately when you get here, it becomes clear that people are doing something real here. It was important for me to be able to see the result of the work, and I see it here every single day. And, despite all the negative predictions, all sorts of circumstances, obstacles, legal, for example, it seems to me that such a form of community is stable. Stable in all times and conditions. Even if the organization is forced to leave this office, for example, and will be deprived of funding options...Still, as there is a fairly wide range of people with the desire in the heart to do something and change, it will still exist. It matters a lot to me. Working in the organization has changed me very much, my own internal potential got revealed.

Alexander PEREDRUK, functions in the organization – PR, press-service management on individual legal cases, since 2012: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is an organization that helps people believe in their rights, take responsibility for their own fate, destiny of their relatives and society as well as to learn how to defend their rights by legislative means. Why I started working here? – I saw an opportunity to change myself and change what's around me. Did this work in the organization change me? Yes, it did. The organization has given me an opportunity for professional and personal growth, including moral aspect. It was here where I came to understand the value of human life, dignity and need of participation of each one of us in public life».

Olga PAVLOVA, Hotline operator, cooperates with the organization since 2003, working full-time since 2009: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is an enlightenment. You begin to look at life differently. Organization allows you to understand what is happening around you, in the city, in the country...Do not let you get zombied. It makes you think of the many important questions of life. When I had problem in my family I got help to understand how to solve it, what mistakes

I made. After stepped on a rake myself, I realized that we should not allow others to do so, try to prevent someone else's problem, suggest, show, what not to do. What did the job in the organization give me? I became much stronger. I realized that my power – is in my environment, ambiance. How form it is how I will live!»

Olga GORDON, psychiatrist, psychotherapist; works since 2007. My function in the organization is a freelance professional. I examine victims of violence in the army, give medical report, recommend one or another extra examination to clarify the diagnosis. I'm engaged in psychological rehabilitation.

«Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization in my understanding are people professionally engaged in protecting rights of recruits and soldiers. I appreciate their sense of justice, fairness and independence. I offered to help in rehabilitation of violence victims, as I saw people honestly engaged in important work. I did it on impulse, without thinking, and never regretted that decision.

Work in the organization have not changed me, I came here as a mature, formed person. But my competence increased here, I have mastered new techniques and successfully use them in rehabilitation.

Anton SHCHERBAK, lawyer, coordinator of military personnel rights protection department in the organization – 2,5 years: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is a union of concerned people who «profess» certain common ideals. While serving in the army I faced with things that are not acceptable, and being within the «system» never accepted and believed that it should not exist. So I realized that fundamental changes in the system have to be made. After a while, when I moved from my hometown to St. Petersburg, got acquainted with the Organization. For a few months I was a volunteer and then I was offered a job on a permanent basis. Working here has contributed to my personal growth and transformation of certain philosophical systems.

Olga ALEKSEEVA, responsible for financial, administrative, organizational work in the organization. Occupies different positions for more than 10 years: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is my own, native home. It is – a real work, now – a work of a lifetime. More important, perhaps, than the family matters and duties. I can still say that this work satisfies me in sense of my attitude. I had an opportunity to observe the organization evolving from birth, how it was built (my father is one of the organization' founders). I sympathized people who engaged in such difficult activities because they understood gravity and severity of problems that are met by employees and volunteers. For me, these problems are like personal pain, family circumstances, and therefore I felt the importance of this activity. What changed in me during work? I gained more experience, confidence, courage. Even my character changed. Now I began to treat everything more carefully. So I began to realize the value and predict consequences of any actions and decisions.

Lydia PARAMONOVA, administrator of the organization for more than 10 years: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» once was a salvation for my son! Hope. Ray of light. Responsive, wonderful, knowledgeable people. Professionals. Taught how to act. Helped relive everything that happened to my son, to me, to my family. Why did I start to work here? I wanted to share experience, help other people, help others misfortunes. Times were hard. A lot of grief. Crowds of people came to us and each was necessary to be listened to, be supported, advised. It was important to be involved in this common matter. It detracted from sad thoughts, give strength, sense of personal usefulness. What did the job here give me? A new meaning of life. Calm, confidence that you will not be alone, that there are a number of people who care of other people's concerns. It gives strength. In our organization human woes, problems are common. Support, help, advice, salvation, being together – these words are worthy and reliable.

Alexandra GUDIMENKO, lawyer. More than 10 years works on specific cases, advises people seeking help, and the organization in general: «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is a place where people find help. Where someone understand their troubles and needs. Where no one turns away from those who need protection and assistance. The organization is a team of excellent, extraordinary people with a truly clean and honest ideas and ideals. People who want to change and do change the world for better. Place trying to teach others to think, to believe in their rights, teach them how to defend and protect. A little island of light in the darkness. That's how I see the organization. I work here because we are need. Because there are people who have nowhere else to go for help. Every day I learn from everyone who works here. They are an example to me in many ways: sincerity, selflessness, patience, kindness. Next to these people you want to become better, equal to and match them».

The organization staff is united by common goals, ideas and general attitudes, confidence in the rightness of their cause, general optimism and look to the future.

SOME RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITY

For twenty-five years of organization work:

- ***With our help more than 25 000 recruits and military personnel were protected;***
- ***Human Rights School classes were visited by more than 75 000 people ;***
- ***Over 35 000 people addressed the «hot line»;***
- ***more than 50 000 requests were sent to different institutions and organizations;***

On average, each year 700-800 people soldiers only approached the organization. Among the reasons for approaching for many years health problems (75% of servicemen named this reason); tortures (45%); irregularities during recruitment (40%) are among leaders.

The most common reasons for approaches to the organization over the years are:

- Health
- Lack of medical care
- Extortion
- Failure to comply with recruitment rules
- Repressive recruitment
- Torture by colleagues
- Torture by officers
- Beatings, abuse by colleagues
- Beatings, abuse by officers
- Sexual violence
- Consequences of service
- Slave work
- Soldiers trade
- Searching soldiers with no communication available for a long time
- Sending recruits to Chechnya, Georgia, Dagestan and others.
- Content in zindan (deep pit)
- Absence of «combat» benefits payments
- Parents of the dead rights
- Inhuman conditions of service
- Right for alternative civilian service
- Violations of demobilization terms
- Convicted and corrective labor institutions
- Psychiatry
- Pressure-signed contract
- Injuries in the army

- Rights of reserve officers
- Document Delays
- Tough family situations
- Suicides
- Consultations on the rights of the servicemen
- Failure to be relieved in time
- Claims to the medical advisory committee
- Unit forced exit
- Disease received in the army (AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis, mental illness, disability)
- Consultations on recruitment
- Consultations on performance at duty
- Consultations on medical grounds
- Consultations on recruit rights



ARCHIVE TESTIMONIES

Archives of the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization include a significant amount of information, which allows to judge of both on scale and urgency of problems in interaction between society and the army, and on the effectiveness of the organization. The organization's experts say that the archive contains evidence of human tragedies and is like some terrible tangle of pain, sorrow, problems, injustice, absurdity...and victories, large and small. Defencelessness, infantilism, injustice, human fears are mixed in it with issues and events of the country, army and society in the last twenty-five years...Every randomly pulled page – is a human destiny:

1999 – 2001:

...Forcedly left the unit. Was beaten by three officers (feared to name), ridden for more than a day to a hot radiator. Got burns...

...Forcedly left the unit. Was raped...

...Mother of a soldier from Sverdlovsk region. «Son beaten to death in barracks»

...Forcedly left the unit. Was beaten in front of formation in the stomach and face...

...Ask for help with the WCC²¹. Beatings, poor diet, lost 12 kg in 2 months...

...Forcedly left the unit. Served in Moscow region. Beatings, humiliation, torture...

...Ask for help to be commissioned. Hepatitis C. Liver is very sick and left hand rots...

...From the Rostov region. Mother: «Help! There is no communication with a son for a month. Sent to Dagestan...»

...Mother of Dmitry Sh. (military unit in Buinaksk, Dagestan) told me: «When I saw my son, I almost fainted. I barely recognized him. He looked at me strangely, scattered and desperate look. He was dirty, lost 18 kg. Before my arrival, he was sent to the hospital due to dysentery. He slept in his uniform, could not wash for a month and was covered with mud and lice. He was undernourished, have not seen bread in 3 days»

...Forcedly left the unit. Was raped...

...Concussion, repulsed spleen, various forms of torture...

...A soldier from Kronstadt. Suicide attempt with trachea and lung injury, was found in the stairwell of an apartment house...

...Forcedly left the unit; left in Arkhangelsk, but there is a threat of return to the same unit in Vologda with violence...

...Beating torture, threats, moral humiliation...

...Beatings, torture, soldiers put in the barn, in the pit...

Years 2002-2004:

...Alexander, 21, arrived in «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization in October, 2002. He was summoned up in May of the same year (construction troops). He

²¹ VVK – military medical commission. Solves problems of determining fitness for military service.

was declared fit for military service in spite of tuberculosis. Military enlistment office ignored the documents confirming the disease, and still recruited him. During military service Alexander suffered from nosebleeds, had a concussion, and for 21 times was ill with pneumonia. Tried to commit a suicide. During this period, he was never examined by doctors...

...15 people forcedly left the unit. They were regularly beaten and abused. The last straw was the beating of soldiers awakened early in the morning, several officers on the head, legs and back with a rubber hose and iron bars. Doctors later confirmed 3 concussion and numerous bruises on soldiers. One soldier who remains in the unit has several fractures. Partly slave labor was used, provided cheap labor for value. Humiliation, threats, various forms of torture, extortion of money – a norm of life; armory, no windows, beds, lack of food – for punishment;

...Beatings, threats, torture, took money, collected parcels, electric shock, absence of payments...

...During the service, especially in the Caucasus during Chechen wars, a lot of cases were recorded of officers trading soldiers. So, in 2002, a mother searching for her son who served in Vladikavkaz, approached the organization: «It took me a very long time to figure out where exactly my son served. When I finally came to the unit, I found out that they had tried to sell him twice. He was beaten, because he resisted, rejected. I saw it with my own eyes. While locals walked freely on the territory of the unit choosing suitable soldiers for themselves...

...Sergeant Ivan D.: «Our unit was led by Colonel L. We were a repression squad. I was accused of spying for Chechens, and was thrown into the dungeon, where I spent 3 months. We were beaten by the Colonel with iron rod. We were not fed. Hosed with cold water and forced to sleep in a pool of water. In the pit, where we were thrown and had to relieve themselves. I was also accused of stealing and selling weapons to Chechens, and I was forced under torture to confess. They used electric shocks, pierced my hands and feet with long needles, I lost teeth due to beatings...

...A letter from the mother of a soldier from Boksitogorsk: «Serves less than a month in Mozdok. Lying in the hospital. he writes: «I write from the hospital, I was hit on the head with stool for several times so hard it broke. There was a heart attack. Doctors said that I might be put in a psychiatric hospital...also get beaten in the hospital. Already beaten off all kidneys. On June, 21 we give an oath and are sent to Chechnya». Written all the words out, ask for help. He is my only one. Mothers! I can only hope for you. Save me and my son! Help transfer him close to me to the area! I'll wait for protection and assistance!

...Bullying, suicide attempt, refusal to initiate a criminal case...

...The state of health, depression, suicide attempt...

...Forced recruitment, photo cut out from passport and glued to the military card, beatings in the unit, bullying...

...Ryazan Region. Beatings, humiliation, torture, living in the wood for 3 days;

Years 2006 – 2008:

...My son was sick (high temperature, 38.5). On December, 22nd through GAI (State Traffic Police) was put outside and handed over to the military commissariat of the Kirov region. Was kept there for a day and on December, 25, 2006 taken to the unit. A week later I was in the medical unit. Then he was sent to the hospital with hearing loss. At the moment, he did not recover...

...from the application of the mother caught on the street without any explanation, was taken to the Kirov Military Commissariat forced to sign some papers and then taken to the police station #31 to a cell. In the morning they were taken to the military enlistment office. Commissioned.

...On November 21 near «Petrogradskaya» metro station military recruiting office seized 20 people and took them to the district military enlistment office and kept them until parents had come to literally buy them out. One young man's parents could not buy him back because they lived in Novgorod. In the Novgorod recruiting office he is registered and has a respite for six months for health reasons. As aunt of the detainee reported by phone the amount was only 1,500 rubles. But to pay for a person having a legitimate delay, in her opinion, was unfair. Therefore, she didn't bring money and made staff recruiting office inquire about her nephew. The workers of Petrogradsky district military office had to make a request to Novgorod where a respite was confirmed. But they managed to hold the draft board in St. Petersburg.

...One evening after the repair works Sergeant G. spilled 2 buckets of water on the floor, called junior recruits and told them to lie down on the floor and crawl to him about 5 meters on their stomachs with their hands behind their backs. After that he made them all do push-ups in the amount of 30 times, and then began to strike them all in a row, kicked the ankle with his leg and a stomach with his, and then let them all go sleep...

Years 2009-2010

...Anton ran away from the unit. He was caught. «They took off the clothes and wanted to rape with entrenching shovel. Lieutenant K. wanted to do that. I was again smeared in zelenka and they wrote «I am a criminal» on my body. When brought to the division, the commander beat me with a bayonet knife over the head». I had a bruised eye and head. Again, eyebrows and head were shaved, put in handcuffed with weights... Then I tried to commit suicide...

...At the entrance to «Ladozhskaya» metro station there was a chain of policemen who passed like through a sieve a the flow of incoming subway citizens, catching all young people in the crowd coming under the age of recruitment. Close to the metro there was a civilian minibus «Gazelle», where police using force and filthy language, pushed all young people. Vasily was trying to call parents, but only he managed was to tell he was taken to the car and be taken away. Then the father heard policeman smear over the phone ordering to stop filming on cameras and mobile phones. stop ringing, threatened to break all phones. All the young people were taken to the Krasnogvardeisky military

commissariat where documents were given to the police officer on the military on duty. He was able to call the distributor at Zagorodny Prospekt quickly said that there are many of them, already undergoing a medical examination ready to shave heads...

...from the statement of the mother: On 13.12 I received a phone message from my son Denis Sukhov, who is a recruit and was registered in the St. Petersburg Vyborgsky district military commissariat, that he was detained by police and taken to the recruiting station. Upon arrival to the recruiting office, I tried to find out reasons for detention of my son Denis Sukhov. No documents confirming the legality of detention officers of the military commissariat actions were provided. I was asked to bring belongings of my son and his documents to the recruiting station. In case of disobedience to one of the employees of the Military Commissariat he threatened to send my son to a military unit, staffed with military personnel who had a criminal record. When I pointed out the illegality of their actions four employees of St. Petersburg Vyborgsky district Military Commissariat attacked me, knocked to the floor and grabbed the collar of clothes, dragged me out commissariat office. Then threw me on the ground in front of the door, followed by throwing my things. At that time, my son was kept with arms behind, held by three officers.

Years 2014-2015:

...Call on August, 22. Mother is looking for her son (1994 year of birth): «...recruited to Pskov. On 15.08.14 I have been sent to the border with Ukraine – 200 km from Lugansk. Since then, any connection was lost with him. Everywhere I went and called no one can could provide a connection with his son. I have a bad feeling».

...Call on August, 28. My wife is looking for a husband (1987 year of birth): «I beg for your help in search of my husband, who served under contract in Kostroma in May 2013 rank as sergeant, squad leader. In the last phone conversation he said they came to exercises on the border with Ukraine, and it's been a month since the communications ceased. What happened is not clear to me. Ready to go anywhere in the country, at any time. Help!!!»

...Call on October, 27. Mother from Ulan-Ude – about her son: «...son is now 26 y.o. Previously he was called aged 18 he was called for 1.5 years. However, he served only a year, as was transferred to reserve due to psychiatric reasons. This year – on 02.07.14. he volunteered to fight in the Ukraine, got to Shakhtersk. I recently learned that my son is a prisoner. A Ukrainian lawyer contacted me and informed that my son is charged with st..260, Part 5 of the Criminal Code (10 to 15 years in prison). Now since 16.10.14. he was taken to jail in Kharkov. My son was allowed to be given the opportunity to make a call. I have addressed everywhere: media, military, FSB,...no one wants to help!»

...Mother died. Can't get released for the funeral. Help...

...The house got burnt together with parents. Got a 12 days dismissal. I not had time to arrange everything. Help get extra permission...

...3 days ago I was beaten by senior soldiers. Can't initiate criminal proceeding. Death threats. What to do in order not to worsen the situation...

...Bullying, beatings, humiliation. Broken jaw. Abusers threaten... In Belgorod in classes all was well. Rewards. Thank-you Letter... Help...

...Forced to sign a contract. Commander offers to record it on video and send parents to know who they brought up...

...hunted guys to the club's room and forced to sign contracts. Nobody was allowed to leave without signing...

...Recruited from Holmogorsk on 30.06.14. In total 37 men, Lieutenant B. is bullying them. Everyone is afraid to speak up. He's forced to run continuously in a gas mask, wash the toilet with his bare hands, humiliates, speak bad about his parents. Ready to commit suicide as is on the brink. Parents are ashamed to complain...

...Ivan. At night from 9.03. to 10.03, when he was on duty (with more colleagues), a drunk battalion commander opened fire on the walls with the pneumatics. Everyone who was close hid. This case was reported to the prosecutor's office, a representative arrived during the night. Leadership, psychologist and political officer tested the situation among witnesses and seven soldiers were interviewed separately. Pellets being found were handed over to the psychologist. All were forced to write explanatory notes indicating they have no claims to drunk Major. Then they were told that all you need to remember, and if any interrogations occur to say we saw nothing. Prosecutor wants all it all to be gone. Previously, the Major fired dogs on the territory...

IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITIES

«When we first started our activity – E.M.Polyakova said in an interview – it seemed to us that we'll exist for 2-3 years. We'll explain to people, teach, they'll understand everything. Will begin to act as needed – and all will be well. And hand in hand we – open civil society – will surely move to new achievements. And such an organization would no longer be needed. However, years passed, and the problem is not gone, and people are coming and coming to us... And the organization is still very needed!»

The fact that the relevance of issues in focus of the organization, is not getting reduced, is evident with official statistics²². The fact that there is still enough unsolved problems in the army is proved by indicators and the number of soldiers convicted for crimes and violations of statutory regulations on personal relations – though reduced, but yet high enough. A number of cases of unauthorized leaving of a unit or the duty station and desertion in 2014 increased. And all this requires learning, understanding, analysis, and, consequently, constant work of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization.

²² Statistical information received upon request of head of the organization Polyakova E.M. by Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), on the 12/23/2015 – letter #6.11.11 / 5166-2R.

**Number of soldiers, recruits and contract officers convicted of crimes (according to the Judicial Department
at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation)**

	I-VI 2010	year 2010	I-VI 2011	year 2011	I-VI 2012	year 2012	I-VI 2013	year 2013	I-VI 2014	year 2014	I-VI 2015
Russia	4107	8472	3258	6824	2696	5240	2326	4801	2270	5036	2605

Number of recorded crimes, provided by Chapter 33 of the Criminal Code

	I-VI 2010	year 2010	I-VI 2011	year 2011	I-VI 2012	year 2012	I-VI 2013	year 2013	I-VI 2014	year 2014	I-VI 2015
Violent acts against a superior (article 334 Criminal Code)	92	197	78	176	63	110	46	81	50	104	55
Breaches of rules on mutual relation between military men with absence of subordination relations between them (article 335 Criminal Code)	1186	2201	1127	1873	703	1398	633	1128	440	939	499
Volunteered leaving of a unit or the duty station (article 337 Criminal Code)	1334	2310	674	1156	427	957	388	934	629	1429	596
Desertion (article 338 Criminal Code)	55	83	28	48	30	44	11	23	29	50	22
Evasion from military service by simulating a disease or other means (article 339 of the Criminal Code)	53	87	107	167	83	155	33	96	115	232	138

An important part of the organization activity nowadays is to solve problems associated with the implementation of the rights of citizens to ***alternative civilian service***.

A low awareness of young people of alternative civilian service (ACS) should be noted as well as of a technology granting the right for alternative civilian service. Lack of awareness on this issue only creates obstacles to citizens for protecting right to beliefs, but also inconvenience during draft commissions which are forced to consider applications received from citizens skipping deadlines. Moreover, such situations often generate a lot of trials additionally loading already highly busy court system.

Alternative civilian service can be fully considered as a fulfillment of a duty to the Fatherland. As citizens and public institutions are interested in solving the labor shortage problem in such important sectors as health care, social services etc. in educating young people in spirit of tolerance to vulnerable citizens (elderly, disabled, orphans, etc.), in raising a level of society humanization.

This is also evident by official statistics, reflecting need for working people on alternative civilian service (ACS):

Reference letter
on the organization of alternative civilian service to types of works, professions, positions lists in which citizens passing alternative civilian service can be occupied

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	To submit a proposal in the lists of all	68	78	84	79	78	81	74	78	82	78	74
1.	Including: – The federal executive bodies	7	10	10	10	11	8	7	7	8	8	4
	– Executive bodies of subjects of the Russian Federation	61	68	74	69	67	73	67	71	74	70	70
2.	Types of works, professions, positions in the lists of all	345	312	256	214	202	151	121	125	130	126	126
	Organizations of all	833	738	755	637	716	710	563	663	636	784	802
3.	Including subordinated: -The Federal executive authorities	281	180	125	125	172	166	106	114	120	120	99
	– Executive bodies of subjects of the Russian Federation	552	558	630	512	544	544	457	549	516	664	703
4.	Jobs, of all	1233	3136	5771	8534	9209	8595	5758	4990	4309	6085	5795
	Including: c the provision of housing%	74%	52%	21%	9%	9%	10%	10,3%	9,4%	9,8%	7,5%	8,4%
	– Without providing accommodation, %	26%	48%	79%	91%	91%	90%	89,7%	90,6%	90,2%	92,5%	91,6%

Finally, an important area in which the organization operates and intends to develop in future is mental ***rehabilitation of servicemen***. The problem of rehabilitation of people who were in the midst of fighting, war, conflict is one of the most important issues dealt with by the experts in many countries of the world. The most severe conditions of modern war force to constantly expand categories of people entering the risk zone. It already includes diplomats, journalists and other professionals who visited or keep operating in combat conditions. In Russia, too, the problem of rehabilitation is solved but is not yet at an adequate scale.

The problem of mental rehabilitation of former military personnel is becoming increasingly important for many professionals. Essentially, it is about re-socialization or, as is also called the process of re-socialization of a large social group, even groups – soldiers who suffered abuse, humiliation, torture, guys who got help in the organization; young people directly involved in armed conflict, been in «hot spots», and returning to civilian life; parents and relatives of these people who also survived stresses of empathy – all them are an enormous scope for professionals of different profiles: doctors, psychologists, sociologists, lawyers. Getting back to civilian life these people tend to find difficult or even impossible to do and continue to live having this hell inside. Heavy imprint of experienced things, with which they now live, is a lock which is closed for entering entrance to a calm old life. Therefore to the extent of its modest possibilities «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is trying to work based on this vitally important area. It should be noted that the psychologist of the organization working with troubled children, is achieving some success.

«SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG»: A MIRROR OF OPINIONS

For successful implementation of their tasks, any non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights organizations are in need of information about the environment in which it operates. They should understand if this environment can add some oxygen for their life, or vice versa, is willing to stop the existing one, whether it supports and shares their goals and values or they are absolutely alien to it. Russian situation specifics is in the fact that the task of forming such an environment is often a parallel, background for third sector organizations themselves, as important as the problems that arise from their own special mission.

In other words, NGO successful activities involve in-depth knowledge of society state, challenges and expectations related to its functioning in modern conditions. It is important to know both for developing strategy and tactics of activities, and for realizing how successful the organization's events can be. That is why a number of projects implemented by the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization includes sociological support.

The proposed material is devoted to reporting some results of sociological support activities²³.

The report includes: data of mass telephone survey of the city's population aged 16 years and older in late 2014²⁴; details of media experts survey, conducted in April 2015 and data from survey of people approached the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization directly in 2015.

1. St. Petersburg population's opinion

Mass survey results make it possible, first of all, to fix the existence of a sufficiently high proportion of citizens uninformed about their rights (55.5%)

²³ All the material is available on the website of the organization – www.soldiersmothers.ru.

²⁴ Sample size – 750, sample is representative of the general population by gender and age. The respondents selection is based on a random sampling method, Maximum error for this sample size is 3.5%. Thus, the selected sample size allows you to evaluate distribution of opinions with sufficient accuracy.



Figure 1. Awareness of their rights (in %)

Also according to the survey can be seen on the existence of a high proportion of residents who feel the vulnerability of their own rights, their own vulnerability (75%)

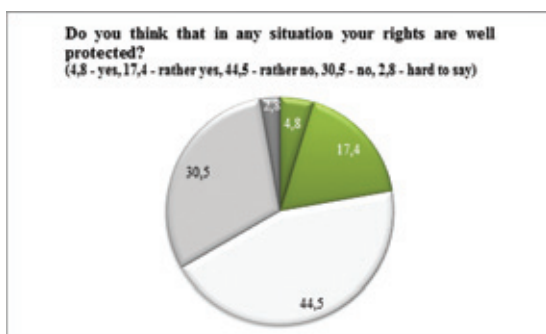


Figure 2. Legal protection: data for a total sample (%)

The fact that over 50% of citizens consider themselves unaware of their rights, and definitely confident citizens – only 4.8% indicates that there is a problem of legal education, counseling people in the city,

Distribution of respondents answers for fame indicators show high degree of awareness of the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» existence: over 70% in varying degree are aware of organization activities, while 15% are very informed.

This is also indicated by the level citizens' knowledge of organization areas of activity. Large proportion – 58.7% – are aware that it is related to the protection of recruits rights; 43.5% – protection of servicemen rights; 26.9% are aware of military' families counseling; 15.9% are even aware of promoting information to the public about its rights, of legal counseling (*respondent could name a few activities, so the total percentage may exceed 100%*)

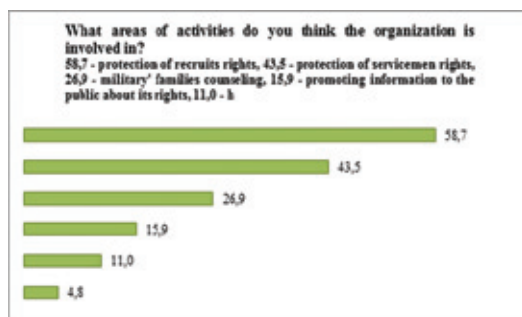


Figure 3. Awareness of areas of activities: total sample data (%)

City residents' need in activities which «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» are engaged in, fidelity of its chosen direction is once again demonstrated in approval and trust indicators. Thus, 69.6% of citizens said that, if necessary, they would themselves approach or advise others to ask for advice and help in this organization. This can be regarded as a large credit of trust as a sign of public recognition.

Such characteristics of city's alarming situation shows that the existence of the organization which purpose is legal education, formation of conscious attitude to protecting human rights, to the awareness of rights and opportunities that give hope and confidence in their own abilities, including its most sensitive and vulnerable members – are in high demand and have its ultimate target. Apparently, there is an urgent need to protect the rights and increase legal awareness together with state institutions as well as develop and improve corresponding initiative civic activities in various fields, which meets the requirements of the Constitution and society expectations.

Evaluating the necessity, usefulness of the organization with a different degree of certainty 82.1% of citizens considered that such work is necessary and useful and only 8.2% said they do not consider it as such.

Results of mass survey of the city' population has shown a high level of importance and residents' in «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» activities. Most respondents know of organization activities approve and trust its activities and find it useful.

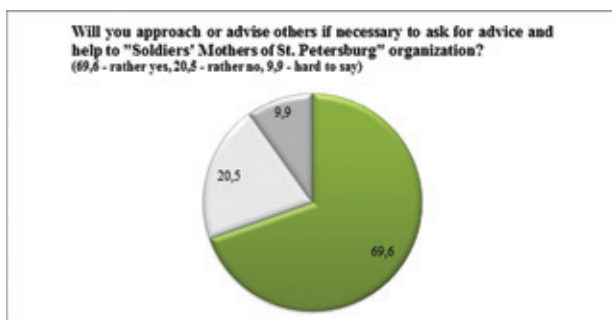


Figure 4. Credibility of «Soldier's Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization: total data sample (%)v

Results of the survey of the city population show a high degree of relevance and demand for respondents in the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» activities. Most respondents are familiar with organization's activities. They approve and show trust in it and think of it as useful. City residents' need in the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization activities are once again demonstrated by the results of approval and trust indicators. Thus, 69.6% of citizens said that, if necessary, they would themselves approach or advise others to ask this organization for advice and help. This can be regarded as a large credit of trust as a sign of public recognition.

It should be noted that the survey was conducted during the period of active media campaign initiated by the authorities against so-called «foreign agents» activities whereas «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization included. Fortunately, people were wise enough and did not show hostility and negativity in their views. This once again shows ambiguity and complexity of Russia's current situation which in certain way and corrects its perception by mass consciousness.

2. Media representatives views

Expert survey of St. Petersburg media representatives was carried out in March-April 2015. It included leading journalists, representatives of digital and printed media of St. Petersburg, national media which have representatives in St. Petersburg.

Results of the expert survey reflect St. Petersburg leading media representatives' current assessment of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization. The organization was evaluated on the basic criteria characterizing achievements of the organization in the areas of its competence, in terms of popularity, usefulness, relevance, effectiveness, trust and others. Findings lead to the following conclusions:

Despite the fact that the sample included media and experts with different views and visions on the current situation in the country and work of non-profit

organizations, evaluations of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization activities are generally positive, friendly and constructive.

According to survey participants, «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» is an organization with a very high rating of popularity. Assessing the degree of organization fame was done on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 is a complete ignorance):

The range of estimates ranged from 3 to 10 points. Score of 7 or 8 was encountered most often.

Average degree of fame on the results based on the expert survey = 7.24 points.

A similar assessment of popularity shows that «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization is very well known and is a prominent actor in the media picture of the city.

Most experts are inclined to think that the level of popularity of the organization is on a national level, because, despite binding to the local level by its name, the information usually newsworthy for St. Petersburg, is fast in becoming relevant for a federal level discussion.

Almost all experts interviewed, regardless of their subjective attitude to different aspects of organization' activities find it necessary and useful in general.

Examples of the comments expressed by the experts in answering this question :

- *Useful. Specialized legal assistance to the population is needed*
- *Useful because modern Russian society must have as much human rights organizations as possible*
- *Surely useful. Makes Ministry of Defence «awake»*
- *Useful. This kind of public control is unique for the Army as all the other structures are mainly fictional*
- *Working on specific activities and achieving success in their work, Soldiers' Mothers are working on the development of civil society, spread of universal values, by example demonstrating the effectiveness of human rights institute.*
- *Useful. The organization activities is a factor partially offset by the most egregious violations of servicemen rights. In some cases an appeal to the organization becomes a last hope of soldiers and their families.*
- *I consider it useful. Because the state is not able to track down facts of human rights violations, especially in the Armed Forces. There is a mutual bail. Also until entirely contract-based army is created in the country there is no possibility to talk of ending this organization's activities. And, of course, given current course on the outbreak of war; adopted in foreign policy, «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» are the last and the only organization that is able to monitor situation with illegal sending of recruits to spots of military operations etc.*

Most experts considered the organization's activities timely, relevant. However, some experts found it difficult to assess its timeliness saying they do not see special significance of the organization.

When asked about the degree of influence of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization experts claimed it as one of the most influential human rights organizations in St. Petersburg, as it is able to influence decisions of the state and, above all, decisions of local authorities. Influence, according to experts, is primarily given by an impeccable reputation – well-deserved by decades of selfless work. It inspires confidence in journalists, colleagues, people in general. Practice shows that organization is de facto considered as influential by the military who have to reckon with the presence of such an organization and even adjust their decisions in connection with its activities. An interesting thought by one of the experts is that the organization is influential the way as «mother is an influential figure in our society; in other words – not always and not for everyone, but often for many».

Most experts noted a high return on organization's activities, its effectiveness perceptible for mass consciousness. According to experts, changes still occur though not as rapid as we'd like.

Examples of experts' statements:

- *Their work brings perceptible results. One organization with, lets say, twenty employees can't change mass perception. But it's obvious that without Soldier's Mothers the situation would be even worse. This organization is a small island of sanity in the ocean of Russian madness.*
- *Changes in the minds may seem not huge, but the presence of the organization itself in the media field is a very important factor for the existence of civil society.*
- *The organization brings perceptible results and, of course, initiates changes in mass consciousness... it fights legal nihilism. Such work never has an instant impact on what is happening but it gradually expands public opinion knowledge to what is happening in the army and – is no Ministry of Defense's secret but the information that should be available to the public. We see that some changes are taking place. From what I know in the Western Military District many units are better in working with representatives of public organizations, lets parents of recruits in, do not prohibit recruits to use mobile phones and internet for communication with family and friends in spare time. This partial «openness» is in fact partly result of «Soldiers' Mothers of Saint – Petersburg» work.*

Speaking of what «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization strength is experts describe such characteristics as experience, reputation, honesty, relevance of information, organization credibility for many citizens as well as the independence and confidence in doing the right thing.

Among weaknesses of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization experts described insufficient public support of the organization. Experts tend to explain this by the fact that a large number of citizens do not feel need to actively protect rights which from their point of view are violated in respect to them. Some experts believe the weak point of the organization is its performance on protecting rights of citizens who chose alternative civilian service. Apparently, in this case it is affected by a lack of awareness or existing stereotypes influencing this issue, not only for many citizens, but also for the experts too. In addition, organization is weakened by external «stability» – being in constant danger of various repressive measures by the state institutes.

Most experts believe the coverage of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization to be insufficient.

Regarding assessment of the nature of «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization coverage in the media most experts believe that, despite existing ambiguous attitude to its work, negative publications occur much less frequently than

positive. Most city media publications if they appear are representing positive image. Negative references are rather typical for certain shows at a national TV channels.

Expert answers allowed to build a rating of media resources based on completeness of the information (each expert could specify multiple resources, so a total could be more than 100%):

1. **Digital media – 90% of experts**
2. **Social media – 49%**
3. **Newspapers, magazines – 14%**
4. **TV and radio – 4%**

A significant number of experts, referring the objectivity of the information in the media about the «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» activities are convinced that in most cases nature of the information is objective. Somewhat less experts believe that in most cases the information is more opportunistic by its nature.

In assessing prospects for the organization, experts were not unanimous and expressed different points of view – from extreme pessimism to cautious optimism about the likely development of the situation.

Examples of expressed expert judgments:

- *Tough times. It is obvious that in the near future they will be have some serious opposition.*
- *With cautious optimism*
- *I am optimistic, despite...*
- *Immediate prospects are bad, but as for mid-term or long-term – possibly better*
- *These prospects depend on the policy of state and request from the society.*
- *However, request for legal education in society is obviously there. And this power can't be ignored. There are perspectives for NGOs but in a long run. The nearest – to fight for survival*

3. Opinion of those who approached «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization



It is clear that those people, soldiers and recruits, who were in a difficult situation and who overcame it thanks to organization's employees actions reviewed it more than positively. Another thing is the delayed effect, such as, for example, implementation of educational activities.

To visualize the action of legal education mechanism, we can turn to «law clinic» – permanent reception office for mass and individual counseling and treatment of citizens, organized in «Soldier's Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization in order to carry out legal awareness-raising activities based on existing legislation. In particular, let's look more detailed into organization's School of Human Rights.

All those who first approach the organization are invited to the school. This form is effective for saving time both for those who approach and consultants. In fact, anyone who addresses the organization expects to receive individual advice. Not only that, they want personal advice, they suggest that «Soldier's Mothers of St. Petersburg» will solve all their problems. This is a small illustration of the Soviet mentality, which is still alive among some of the population. During the Human Rights School course attempts to change such consciousness in the organization are made.

It is important to understand condition of people who come to the organization. They are desperate, helpless, with no idea what to do. In school people are shown that there is a way out. But are cautioned that the road is full of obstacles and there are no

easy solutions. But if they learn to take responsibility for themselves, victory can be achieved. Therefore, the motto of the organization: show people the way so they can help themselves, be responsible and democratic citizens, stand up for each other in violation of their fundamental rights. Users need only two basic components, which are being offered at the school: self-confidence and essential information.

School of Human Rights activities are devoted primarily to recruitment problems, recruits, but also apply to a much wider range of problems. The goal of courses is to make sure that people have understanding and confidence, know their rights, laws, to understand how to apply them in a particular situation so that they are able to defend themselves, without any involvement of specially trained people.

But the goal of organization is still much wider. It is not only about letting people get to know their rights written in the Constitution but also learn to take responsibility for their own destiny, and, on their own, mastering some, not with most sophisticated techniques could solve their problem. And also, if possible, might be using their skills, acquired experience, to help others. This is perfect. Therefore, the organization encourages coordination, people cooperation to solve their problems. There are special techniques that are conventionally referred to as «support groups». Therefore, the value of these activities is that in addition to transferring knowledge they exchange experience, demonstrate their own capabilities and accomplishments that are much more important than traditional lecture.

The above eloquently confirms words of the organization' specialist coordinating activities of the School: «Article of the law, Constitution itself does not solve almost anything. It does not matter until you are not attached to the article. While there is no feeling, your understanding of own truth. As long as you do not have support, team. As long as you do not understand that you are not alone, that you decide some important things, that you are moving in an important direction, that someone took this path and won, that you are defending your vital values. And that is why we pay so much attention not just to restatement of the articles of the Constitution, but also the fact that you have a chance to speak, have an opportunity to share their experiences, able to help other people by their example, who were perhaps even in a more difficult situation».

Between all occasions for treatment there's a lot in common. Ignorance of rules, ignorance of the law, ignorance of opportunities, existing stereotypes, myths, stories of others, and fear, fear... fear to make a step, fear of the officer, of doctors, police, in front of the court. Sometimes, employees of the organization, especially invited people to court on a tour to show that it is not scary and to overcome fear that exists in many, even in the courthouse.

The existing system checks us every time. It does something and watches – on what concepts does a person live? Sitting in the cell of fear or exists in a legal field?

So – one of the first and most important aspects of classes are human rights. Visitors of the organization can not usually talk of what rights they have...

That is why the organization experts are trying as much as possible to intelligible, clearly bring valuable knowledge to listeners. The first thing that comes to mind to people when it comes to human rights – is education, recreation, on a more advanced level – freedom of speech. But what is usually not even remembered? These are key rights.

It is necessary to understand – the key value, key right is the right to live. Up to year 1993 the right for human life in our country, as such, was absent. There was no legal ability and opportunity for a person to manage his life. The man was only a cog in the system that has worked in a certain way and for certain purposes. And humans had no feeling of opportunity to defend their life.

One of key rights is the right for personal dignity respect. Each one formulates it for himself what is – a personal dignity. In addition, there are article 21 of the Constitution, which, inter alia, includes the prohibition of torture is in the same article. It is forbidden to use tortures to the person in any circumstances. It is forbidden to use humiliating treatment or punishments.

And, of course, health rights. These are key values – life, health and dignity. It is something without what all the rest pales generally speaking.

Participants are invited to school to understand, feel, see how important it is to protect yourself, your loved one, and how much common are there in these particular small victories.

People are gradually beginning to realize that all of what is said and done, works, in particular, for the benefit of our army, for preservation of human life in the army, to create and maintain relationships that should be there, to change for better. Because no reduction in service life or the introduction of buffet breakfasts, washing machines in military units and showers does not change the situation fundamentally. The situation can be changed only attitudes to a person, soldier as a citizen, only with understanding of the value of his life.

And when people came to the organization – this is only now beginning to take the first steps to protect their rights and thereby carry out an important military reform, because they change the army, but did not the Ministry of Defence. Awareness is growing gradually that when citizens themselves do not admit to the army those who should not be there, when they help people who have already suffered in the army, then they prove that, indeed, it is the society that can help build everything exactly as it should be. After all, the system behaves very cynical if a person is not armed with necessary knowledge. It uses human and discards him. And yet these situations occur often, unfortunately.

To illustrate the resulting effect let's turn to a survey of people²⁵ who approached «Soldier's Mothers of St. Petersburg» human rights organization. Among them: 55% are women (mothers, sisters, girlfriends, grandmothers, friends, relatives of men who

²⁵ 200 selected randomly people were interviewed.

need help from the organization specialists) and 45% – men (youth of premilitary age, draftees, recruits, contract soldiers, ex-soldiers, fathers, grandfathers, friends). People of different ages come for organization's service, advice, aid²⁶.

43% of respondents turned to «Soldier's Mothers» because they themselves encountered a problem, 53% – because their close and loved ones had problems. Why exactly have people turned to the organization? The survey results are as follows:

1. *Not knowing what opportunities are provided by law for solving this problem, lack of understanding what opportunities there are available in my situation – 65%*

2. *I did not know what to do, how to solve a problem – 57%*

3. *Ignorance of own rights – 56%*

4. *Confusion 39%*

5. *Feeling of powerlessness in the situation – 24%*

6. *Fear, panic – 17%*

7. *Despair – 14%*

8. *Other – less than 1%,*

It is important to understand that visiting even one session, people will remember at least something of the important postulates of the «puzzle», from which comes the strength and confidence of a person.

²⁶ Sample representation is as follows: aged 16-17 – 5%; 18-24 – 22%; 25-27 – 5.5% ; 28-34 – 1,5% ; 35-44 – 21%; 45-54 – 8% ; 55-64 – 25%; 65+ years – 2%.

Human Rights School Accents:

- *Basic rights of every human being are life, health and dignity.*
- *In order to appreciate and feel these values it is necessary to take a responsibility for one's own life*
- *When you take this responsibility, you start feeling some freedom, you begin to feel certain freedom, you understand why you're doing what you're doing. Your actions involve awareness.*
- *My life should be a value. When my life, my dignity and my health, will become value for me then they are of value to others.*
- *While registering to the military there is a quantitative measurement of recruitment resource based on law. The second goal from the point of legal view is a qualitative change of recruitment resource. Everyone should clearly understand even if I wish to join the army, want to serve it does not mean you need to break away and go there tomorrow. This means that I have to make sure, and if I can, with my health, fitness level fully serve the Fatherland, be useful to full extent and cope with all pressure without damage to own health? And after making sure everything it's all right, go. But do not forget to look into what rights you have and how they can be protected, based on the content of the Russian Federation laws.*
- *Article 24 of the Constitution. Learn to understand, when you You have right for information and which information. Information about the personal file content. Private business is not a secret document. Your right is to get acquainted with the personal file as the recruit and carry out his photography. Your right – to request certified copies of medical records and health information, and respectively receive it. Your right is to get acquainted with the list of recruiting medical commission members or commission on military registration members. So you have right to know any information that affects your rights and freedom.*
- *Articles 23 and 51 determine that you have the right not to transfer an official the information that you do not want to transfer; information that is your privacy, your personal secrets, family secrets.*
- *Police has no right to engage in tracing recruits in accordance with the police law. It is engaged only by informal arrangements.*
- *Everyone should understand – there is own private space where no one should interfere. This are my documents that I have no particular reason or special reasons, proper execution to ever hand it over to anyone. And show it out of my own hands, or show a notarized copy – also out of own hands.*
- *Article 45, part 2. It says everyone has the right to defend their rights and freedoms by all means not prohibited by law.*

The following data show how useful for people was their interaction with «Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg» organization – here are their answers to the question of what changed in them after a visit to the organization:

- 1. I learned a lot of useful and necessary things – 73%**
- 2. Got to understand that there is a place where I can always get expert advice – 53%**
- 3. Got to understand that I will get advice what concrete steps should be taken to solve the problem – 52%**
- 4. I learned what steps need to be taken according to the law to solve this problem – 50%**
- 5. There is hope now that there is a solution – 48%**
- 6. Got to know I knew nothing at all or not know much about own rights – 44%**
- 7. Got self-confidence – 41%**
- 8. Got to understand that I can get advice not only from professionals, but also from people who are dealing with or solved same problem – 37%**
- 9. Made sure that there are people who are dealing with or solved same problem – 35%**
- 10. Got a feeling I am not alone – 30%**
- 11. Believed in my own power, abilities – 28%**
- 12. Panic mood began to retreat – 19%**
- 13. Got very confused now and do not know where to start – 1.5%**
- 14. Other – less than 1 %**

Here are some statements of people who visited Human Rights School classes – live reaction to what was seen and heard of those who suddenly took a look at something familiar, even themselves:

Examples of opinions expressed by Human Rights School participants:

- *...I am, frankly, scared now. I feel myself very passive. And I do not know if I can do enough because I actually understood the main thing – it's not they who formally approached in the military recruitment, it's me who sat in the hallway and waited until all this was over...*
- *...Indeed, we knew little about your existence and how greatly you do help. Helping to look around completely in a different way...*
- *...I probably missed the chance a little too, but still there is hope now that something else can be done. At least, I want to thank you that there is such a wonderful organization...*
- *...You helped organize, calmed, motivated not to be afraid of. And most important, now I will not be angry for nothing and I will behave respectfully to them but stick to my line. Like this!*

Meaning of all the activities of this organization are very accurately expressed by words of one of the employees: «We were really approached by people with disasters, with problems, other questions. But even in the worst situation when nothing can be done to help, but a simple show of human support – it's still important. Because the work that takes place here, life that is lived here has a certain purpose and meaning. One can see the positive outcomes of this work. And this is very important, when you see a person comes to the first lesson with what look... and the way he looks like, behaves when he comes here with some small victory achieved! You watch stages and the result – something he could not achieve for a long time and suddenly he realized which is his first step... It is a completely different state, it is a completely different feeling. This is – a different person now! And just for the sake of such moment we should keep doing what we do no matter what!»

«Soldiers' mothers of St. Petersburg»

Address: St. Petersburg, Raz'yezhaya street, 9
(«Vladimirskaaya» and «Dostoevskaya» metro station)

Open to visitors:

Monday – Friday from 2 to 8 p.m.

Legal training for prerecruits, recruits and their relatives are held
on schedule in the calendar of events.

Head of Organization: Ella M. Polyakova.

Phones: 712-41-99 & 712-50-58 (2 to 8 p.m.).

«Hot Line» (9 a.m. to 8 p.m.):

+7 (906) 263-17-17 (on the rights of military servicemen);

+7 (911) 772-34-40 (on the rights of conscripts).

**Applications for the protection of the rights of military servicemen can
be accessed through an online form or by mail:**

voen@soldiersmothers.ru.

**Applications for the protection of the rights of conscripts can be
accessed through an online form or by mail:**

prizyv@soldiersmothers.ru.

Nonresident citizens for Skype-consultations can use an online form.

Skype-consultations schedule: every Monday and Thursday
from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Press Secretary of the organization: Alexander Peredruk,
+7 (921) 871-60-99,
press@soldiersmothers.ru

Roman Mogilevsky, Tatiana Shaidarova

«SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF ST. PETERSBURG» IN THE MIRROR OF VIEWS, FACTS, FIGURES

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*No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.*

John Donne