

A Statement

The Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield responds to the armed attack on two Georgian citizens by the Russian occupation forces on November 6, 2023 near the occupied territory of village Kirbali, on the so-called South Ossetian administrative boundary line (ABL), as a result of which one Georgian citizen was shot dead, and the other was kidnapped and is detained in occupied Tskhinvali. The Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield condemns the violent actions of the occupying power. Our team expresses its condolences to the family and relatives of Tamaz Ginturi.

According to reports, Tamaz Ginturi and Levan Dotiashvili were at the church of St. Lomisa in the village of Kirbali, when the occupation forces opened fire. Video disseminated online, shows how they were opening the sealed doors of the church before the armed forces arrived. The church of Lomisa has been on the occupied territory since 2008, however, despite this, the local population still visits the temple on religious holidays, especially on Lomisoba festival. After 2018, the de facto authorities of South Ossetia forbade citizens of Georgia to approach the church. After the 2023 Lomisoba, Russian soldiers blocked off the door of the church with a tin plate.

Since occupation, restricted access to holy places and cemeteries (both for clergy and worshipers) in the occupied villages and villages located close to the occupation line has become common. Apart from the Lomisa Church, the population of Kirbali village has limited access to the other churches in the village, namely the Cemetery and the Church of St. George, located on Georgian government-controlled territory near the occupation line, and the Church of the Mother of God. Cases of illegal abduction of Georgian citizens from the area surrounding churches are frequent.

The situation is similar in the villages of Adzvi and Kere, where the churches fell beyond the occupation line. In 2014, Russian FSB troops (illegally deployed along the occupation line) set up banners marking the de-facto border in the vicinity of Adzvi and barred locals from crossing, leaving two Adzvi churches in the occupied territories as a result of 'borderization'. Several citizens of Georgia were detained from the Adzvi church.

** The statement belongs to the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield and does not reflect the views of Blue Shield International or the whole Blue Shield Movement*

Village Kirbali

Village Kirbali in the Gori municipality is located near the occupation line. There are four churches in the village: Lomisa church, which has been located beyond the occupation line since the war in 2008; churches of Mother of God and Saint George, which are located on the territory controlled by the Government of Georgia, but due to their proximity to the occupation line, the villagers have limited access to them; and the Kviratskhoveli church located in the center of the village.



Village Kirbali, Church of the Mother of God (upper left corner), Lomisa church (upper right corner), Church of the Saint George and Cemetery (lower right corner). The red line marks the occupation line.

Lomisa Church

Lomisa Church located on the occupied territory is not separated from the village by a barbed wire fence,¹ however, there is the so-called border-marking banner placed in its proximity.



Church of Lomisa with barred door, August 2023 © Davit Katsarava / Radio Liberty

Until 2018 the village population was able to celebrate Lomisoba in the church.² On May 30, 2018, the de facto authorities of South Ossetia warned the Security Services of Georgia through an EUMM hotline that in case of visiting the Lomisa shrine, Georgian citizens would be arrested and taken to the Tskhinvali detention center on charges of border violation.³ On this day, Georgian law enforcers did not allow the villagers to go near the church.⁴

In 2023, the leader of the voluntary group, “anti-occupation movement”, Davit Katsarava, shared photos taken from the drone showing that the entrance door of the Lomisa church in Kirbali, Gori municipality was blocked and the door was covered with a tin plate.⁵ According to the residents of the village, after the 2023 Lomisoba festival, the Georgian flag was raised near the church, which was followed by the door being blocked the next day, on June 7. The representative of the Patriarchate of

¹ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/kirbali-sakhifato-sopeli/29155925.html>

² <https://www.democracyresearch.org/geo/261/>

³ <https://shorturl.at/swLOZ>

⁴ https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=10156503713737360

⁵ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32568233.html>

Georgia also confirmed this fact. According to the resident of the village, the tin cover was removed by a Georgian youth, after which the control of the occupation line was tightened. On November 6, 2023, two citizens of Georgia, Tamaz Ginturi and Levan Dotiashvili, were driving to Lomisa church to pray. The representatives of the occupation forces noticed them and according to their statement, they opened fire because they resisted the arrest. Tamaz Ginturi died from a gunshot wound, while Levan Dotiashvili was detained and taken to Tskhinvali.

Church of Mother of God

The local population is practically restricted from approaching the Church of Mother of God, located north of the village, on the Tbilisi-controlled territory due to security concerns, as the church is only 100 meters away from the occupation line.⁶

Church of Saint George

The Church of Saint George and the cemetery are located east of the village, close to the occupation line, on the territory controlled by the Georgian authorities, however, representatives of the Russian occupation forces patrol the vicinity of the cemetery, which is why the villagers cannot visit the graves. In 2017⁷ and 2018, a Georgian police crew was on duty at the cemetery during Easter and villagers had access to part of the cemetery.⁸



Church of Saint George and Cemetery © memkvidreoba.gov.ge

Abductions are frequent in the village of Kirbali. The facts of abduction of Georgian citizens have been recorded many times, including in 2016⁹ and 2017.¹⁰ In 2021, a man was also illegally detained, who, according to him, was grazing cattle near the church of Saint George: "We were near the church, grazing our cattle, and they came there. They told us that it was their territory. (...) We always graze cattle near the church. They have some (border marking) ribbons tied above the site, but we were below it, they surrounded us from below and arrested me."¹¹

By 2023, a total of up to 30 people from the village have been arrested.¹²

⁶ <https://www.democracyresearch.org/geo/261/>

⁷ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/devnilebi/28435453.html>

⁸ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/kirbali-sakhifato-sopeli/29155925.html>

<https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/saflavebi-saokupacio-qamyof-khaztan/29154585.html>

⁹ <https://ipress.ge/news/regionebi/sophel-kirbalidan-43-tslis-ma>

¹⁰ <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/603429-rusma-okupantebma-sopel-kirbaltan-mamakatsi>

¹¹ <https://shorturl.at/ABNWO>

¹² <https://shorturl.at/uLTU4>