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**Executive summary of publication**

**“SUCCESS STORIES OF LEGAL AID CENTERS NETWORK OF THE UKRAINIAN HELSINKI HUMAN RIGHTS UNION in 2016-2017”**

**2nd edition**

The collection of success stories of the UHHRU legal aid centers network is a description of cases that have been supported by the legal aid centers’ lawyers in 2016-2017 and relate to the protection of such rights and freedoms as the right to a fair trial, freedom of movement, property rights, performance of military duty, right to life, right to social security, protection of the rights of the child, right to access to information. It should be noted that this publication covers only a small part of the work fulfilled by the legal aid network.

The task of this publication is not only to describe the essence of human rights defenders’ work, but also to explain complex issues in a simple language. Its idea was not to talk about complicated legal norms, but to describe legal cases in an interesting form as well as to convey a message on how the cases of average citizens can be successfully resolved in their favor and change our state for the better. It is very important to make sure that every single person in the country feels secure and knows that he/she can protect their rights.

We selected the most interesting and typical cases that people applied to the legal aid centers with. Sometimes a case was solved quickly, even without applying to the court, for example, when lawyers from Rivne assisted a pensioner in forcing a pension fund to recalculate his long service pension. And sometimes the work took years, as in the case considered by the Kyiv legal aid center when it was made possible to re-establish ownership rights to the apartment of a 68-year-old resident of Kyiv who suffered from property scammers shielded by unfair Ukrainian courts. Years of hard work of human rights defenders have provided numerous evidence that an organized criminal group successfully operates in Kyiv, consisting of law enforcement officers, lawyers, notaries and judges.

In frames of the USAID Human Rights in Action Program our lawyers helped to restore the rights of individuals, as in a case considered by the Lviv legal aid center. It was the High Specialized Court of Ukraine for Civil and Criminal Cases that made a final point in the high-profile case against the state bank “Oschadbank”, employees of which had deceived the elderly depositors. The court’s decision is final: the bank must return to the customers all money stolen by its employees.

Human rights defenders from the Ternopil legal aid center together with the “Ecological and humanitarian association “Green World” NGO have set an important judicial precedent. They achieved annulment of the Chortkiv City Master Plan, Ternopil oblast, which had been adopted despite negative conclusion of the state environmental expert examination.

UHHRU specialized Crimea-oriented legal aid center (supported by USAID) together with the UHHRU Strategic Litigation Center achieved the abolition of the discriminatory resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1035, which significantly restricted the transportation of certain goods by Ukrainians from the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea to mainland of Ukraine.

The collection of success stories of the UHHRU legal aid centers network helps people understand the importance of protecting their rights and realize the perspectives of such actions. Surely, such actions require enormous efforts, but the current edition shows that this should be done because this way to influence the legal situation in the country is affordable for every citizen.

Contacts of the UHHRU’s legal aid centers network are available following this link https://helsinki.org.ua/advice-centres/; contacts of the state centers for the provision of free secondary legal aid can be found at: <http://legalaid.gov.ua/ua/local-centres>.

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*The American people, through the USAID, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for 55 years. In Ukraine, USAID’s assistance focuses on such areas as: Economic Growth, Democracy and Governance, Health and Social Transition. USAID has provided 1.8 bln. technical and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine since 1992. For additional information about USAID programs in Ukraine, please visit official USAID website* [*http://ukraine.usaid.gov*](http://ukraine.usaid.gov) *or Facebook page* [*https://www.facebook.com/USAIDUkraine*](https://www.facebook.com/USAIDUkraine)*.*