



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

As for delivery by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1429th meeting of the Permanent Council,
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Mr. Chairperson,

Women, men and children across Ukraine are encountering the threat of rape and other forms of sexual violence widely used as a weapon of war by the Russian armed forces amidst Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

In 2022, several weeks after Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, dozens of reports of conflict-related sexual violence committed by the Russian armed forces started to emerge, especially from the areas that had been or continue to be under the Russian occupation.

This information was largely confirmed by the UN, the OSCE and several non-governmental organizations as numerous reports of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) have been documented by ODIHR, the OSCE Moscow Mechanism missions, the UN OHCHR and the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry.

Human rights organizations and the media also began reporting credible allegations of civilians being raped or otherwise sexually abused by members of the Russian armed forces starting in early April 2022, following the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, as well as later in autumn in the liberated parts of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions.

Several witnesses interviewed by ODIHR recounted incidents of sexual violence, which included rape of a group of women, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and forced nudity as well as threats of rape by members of the Russian armed forces. The crimes have included cases of rape, gang rape, forced nudity and forced public stripping, sexual torture and sexual abuse.

As of January 2023, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine has documented 133 cases of CRSV committed against Ukrainian women, girls, and men. As of May 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office has identified 187 cases of sexual violence by the Russian troops.

It is important to note that this is just the tip of the iceberg. At this stage it is not possible to assess fully the actual scale of CRSV committed by Russian military in Ukraine. Due to the ongoing fighting, continuing occupation of parts of the territory by the Russian armed forces, and mass displacement many crimes remain underreported. Victims of CRSV are often unwilling or unable to report due to various factors, including the fear of stigmatization and safety concerns in the occupied territories.

At the OSCE Human Dimension Committee meeting on 21 March 2023 on the topic of “Combatting sexual violence as a weapon of war” the Prosecutor General’s Office representative provided detailed information about the ongoing efforts in investigating the CRSV crimes in line with international standards, in particular regarding the victim-centered approach, and in close cooperation with the ICC on that issue.

Ukraine closely cooperates with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Among the first practical steps was the opening of centers of assistance for war terror survivors. In 2022, the Framework of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on prevention and response to CRSV was signed.

Ukraine’s second National Action Plan on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 was updated in order to efficiently address the new threats and challenges stemming from the russian aggression, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war by the russian armed forces. Now, it incorporates such important issues as response to CRSV, holistic services for survivors, needs assessment for humanitarian, medical, social, and psychological assistance, expanding the economic opportunities of women from the temporarily occupied territories.

Distinguished colleagues,

It is important to stress that whether used as a military tactic to terrorize, humiliate, and dehumanize individuals or communities, as a means to force populations to flee, or as a method to punish people in captivity, sexual violence committed in the context of an armed conflict is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and amounts to a war crime. Rape and other forms of sexual violence may constitute a crime against humanity, if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, or torture.

Let me remind you, that last year russian president decorated the brigade of war criminals, who raped women and children and committed mass massacre of civilians in Bucha and Irpin – mr. putin indicated that their actions “are a model of the execution of military duty” and saluted their “heroism and tenacity”.

This is just one of the telling elements about how the so-called russian “special military operation” looks like. This is also about what russia’s “traditional values” really are.

We call for the conduct of rigorous investigation of such heinous crimes to ensure justice and accountability.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.