



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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This week marks the start of the OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, an important event to take stock of implementation of our OSCE human rights commitments. There were some notable absences again this year, including the Russian Federation. It's unsurprising that Russia, a country whose forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine, would not want to confront its abysmal human rights record in this forum. Instead, Russia continued to launch missiles and drones at Ukraine, as it did overnight, when it again reportedly attacked Ukraine with 29 kamikaze drones. So today, I would like to talk about one enduring aspect of this record: Russia's ongoing detention of Ukraine's civilians.

In a September 20th report, civil society organization The Media Initiative for Human Rights explained how it had identified 1,168 Ukrainian civilians who are being held in the Russian Federation or in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine. They assessed the real number likely to be five to seven times higher.

Separately, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, or OHCHR, also documented 864 cases of "arbitrary detention" by Russia's armed forces between February 2022 and May 2023. OHCHR believes many of these cases amount to enforced disappearances. Ukrainian civilians were taken from Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Crimea.

OHCHR identified 161 Russian Federation places of detention where Russia is holding or processing Ukrainian detainees. 124 of these detention centers are located in occupied Ukraine, with 5 in Crimea. 35 are in Russia, and two detainee transit centers are located in Belarus. OHCHR found that the Russian Federation forcibly transferred detainees between locations outside of occupied territory, contrary to international humanitarian law.

Mr. Chair, each person the Russian Federation forces into its system of filtration and detention has an individual story of suffering and horror. A story forced on them by Russia.

Take for example the experience of Mykyta Horban. Mykyta and his father were taken from their home by Russian Federation forces. Their captors reportedly tortured them by pouring water into their shoes and keeping them outdoors in the freezing cold, leading to frostbite. No medical care was provided for over a month. In Mykyta's words, "they pushed me to the point where my fingers started falling off my body. After that, I and another guy were taken to a military hospital and had surgery. Only my fingers were amputated, but the guy's leg was cut off to the knee." Mykyta was fortunate enough to return to Ukraine, but his father

remains in Russia's custody. Russia has provided no information about his well-being or whereabouts.

Or take the experience of Olha and her brothers, Oleh and Andrii. After ransacking Olha's house, Russia's troops moved the three siblings to a nearby pit where they were held captive. In the pit, soldiers beat Andrii with a metal rod, breaking his leg. Days later, the three siblings were separated, with Olha and Oleh escaping to make their way back home. Because of his broken leg, Andrii was not so fortunate. After a year, Russia is still holding him somewhere. The only communication Russia has permitted to date is a short note from Andrii saying, "I miss you a lot and hope to see you again one day."

The more we learn about these individual experiences, the better understanding we have of the Russian Federation's overarching strategy. And there is every indication that this is, in fact, deliberate. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Dr. Alice Jill Edwards put it, "the volume of credible allegations of torture and other inhumane acts that are being perpetrated against civilians and prisoners of war by Russian authorities appears to be unabating. These grievous acts appear neither random nor incidental, but rather orchestrated as part of a state policy to intimidate, instill fear, punish, or extract information and confessions."

Mr. Chair, in the face of such cruelty, such inhumanity we must act to hold Russia accountable. It is unacceptable that Russia continues to hold Ukrainian civilians in detention, including Crimea Tatar activists Nariman Dzhelyal, Asan Akhtemov and Aziz Akhtemov. We must all ask ourselves a fundamental question. What would we have this Organization do if it was *our* sister, *our* brother, *our* child that Russia held captive? I ask you all to think that over.

Mr. Chair, we must continue to deploy all our OSCE tools to expose Russia's atrocities and compel Russia to release all the Ukrainian civilians it continues to detain. We must continue to support Ukraine as long as it is needed. Our support is about ensuring respect for international law as well as basic human decency. It's about ensuring every Ukrainian is safe from the brutality and horrors that Russia has inflicted upon them for far too long.

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