

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

Interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral update on the situation of human rights in Ukraine and the interim report of the Secretary-General on the situation in human rights in Crimea

09-10 July 2024

Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, reported the massive missile attacks across Ukraine that occurred on 8 July, including the strike on Ukraine's largest children's referral hospital. This shows the consequences of the war waged against Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

These daily attacks across the country continue to aggravate the human rights situation of civilians causing physical harm, destroying homes and infrastructure, and ripping families apart, leading to long-term socioeconomic challenges including diminished access to education, loss of livelihood, and poverty. He reported that between March and May, 436 civilians were killed and 1,760 injured including children, media workers, healthcare workers, and emergency service personnel. The actual figure is likely much higher.

Coordinated large-scale attacks by the Russian Federation against Ukraine's critical energy infrastructures must stop immediately. They have targeted power generating and distribution facilities significantly degrading Ukraine's capacity to generate electricity. Millions of people across Ukraine experience daily power cuts often for many hours at a time reducing access to water supply, mobile and Internet connectivity, and public transportation, and restricting children's ability to study as many in Ukraine attend school remotely. This affects groups in situations of vulnerability disproportionately especially older people, women, persons with disabilities, and people living in poverty.

Further, he reported that the recently released Ukrainian prisoners of war (POW) have provided detailed accounts of torture, ill-treatment, and sexual violence. They described brutal beatings, prolonged stress positions, electric shocks and beatings to the genitals, dog attacks, and severe food deprivation. Therefore, he urged the Russian Federation immediately to cease such practices, improve detention conditions, establish mixed medical commissions, and grant full access to the OHCHR and independent monitors. On the other side, the torture of Russian POWs ceased when they arrived in official places of internment. The Ukrainian authorities need to investigate these instances and ensure the treatment of POWs at every stage is in line with international law. He called for the complete exchange of all POWs and the unconditional release of those civilians unlawfully detained, including in occupied territory, and for their safe return.

He, then, stressed that residents in occupied territory to obtain the citizenship of the occupying power is a violation of international humanitarian law.

Considering the **Secretariat General's report on the human rights situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the autonomous republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol**, he highlighted ongoing violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and torture and violations to the freedoms of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association.

People perceived as opposing the occupation, including bloggers, journalists, supporters of the people, and pro-Ukrainian activists are targeted. This is all occurring in a context of near impunity with the Russian Federation adopting laws effectively granting amnesty to service persons for a broad range of crimes.

He urged the Russian Federation immediately to cease its use of armed force against Ukraine, withdraw its military forces from the territory of Ukraine in line with the order of the International Court of Justice, and scrupulously respect international humanitarian and human rights law. There needs to be an immediate stop to the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.

The HC concluded by saying that accountability must be served, war is the worst enemy of human rights, it is an aberration not just in the current context but also everywhere else, it has to be shunned and peace must be found in line with the United Nations charter and international law.

In his conclusive remarks, the HC reaffirmed that is absolutely critical for the international community to continue supporting Ukraine in strengthening its electricity production capacity and ensuring that social protection programs for persons with vulnerabilities are fully funded.

Among the several aspects raised by the Member States, the HC focused on the topic of *prisoners of war and civilian detainees*, under the Geneva Conventions Russian Federation has the obligation to transmit information about who is detained and where. He regretted that the Russian Federation continues to deny access to places of detention in occupied territory and in the country, calling on the international community to continue urging the Russian Federation to provide unimpeded and regular access to independent international monitors to all places of detention and internment and to conduct thorough investigations into all allegations of mistreatment and to effectively engage in the establishment of mixed medical commissions. *On conflict-related sexual violence*, the OHCHR has documented that sexual violence has been used as a form of torture to extract information or confessions to intimidate POWs and civilian detainees and to compel them to cooperate with occupying authorities but also as a form of humiliation. It is prohibited under international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law. Other aspects were *reparations, support, and accountability for victims, transfer of civilians, children in the occupied territory, and journalists and media workers in the occupied territory*.

Russian Federation did not make a statement.

Ukraine (concerned country) reported figures of the recent missile strikes, where 38 people died and 170 were injured. Among the targeted civilian objects, the Russian Federation attacked the largest national children's hospital, where seriously ill children received lifesaving medical treatment. The latest images of Ukrainian prisoners of war, those and civilian detainees made shortly after their release from Russian captivity depicted the chilling reality of oppression and terror.

Amidst this chaos, the Secretary General's interim report underscored that the international community must not lose sight of the human rights situation in the temporally occupied territories of Ukraine, including Crimea. Russian authorities are tightening their grip on residents, coercing them into obtaining Russian citizenship and illegally conscripting them into the Russian Army. Taking note of the information on the alleged violation by the Ukrainian side and the recommendations, Ukraine would be rigorously examined to ensure necessary actions are taken in line with our national legislation and international obligations. It demanded the Russian Federation respect its international humanitarian and human rights law commitments.

The accounts of widespread torture and ill-treatment including abhorrent acts of sexual violence must cease immediately. Human rights and humanitarian mechanisms must be granted full and unimpeded access without delay. Ukraine also affirmed that the sooner Russian aggression and war crimes end, the faster just, and lasting peace will be restored. It urged all UN Member States to join this international effort to implement the principles of the Ukrainian peace formula.

Interactive dialogue

46 delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. The majority of them condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine and Russia's continuing violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, including arbitrary detentions, torture, ill-treatment and forced disappearances, and sexual and gender-based violence and the unlawful transfer and deportation of civilians including children. In this vein, **the EU**, and **Italy** for example, deplored the Russian missile attack against a children's hospital in Kyiv. **The Member States** were also alarmed by the findings of your report highlighting the Russian attacks on civilian objects, including on critical energy infrastructure. Among them, **Poland, Georgia, Netherlands, and Denmark** affirmed that dignity and justice must be restored for the countless victims of Russia's aggression. Those responsible must be held to account. In particular, while the **Republic of Korea, North Macedonia, and Portugal** called for Russia to immediately cease its aggression; **Slovenia and the UK** called upon all parties to the conflict to fully uphold their obligations under international law including international human rights law and humanitarian law. Ensuring accountability for their violations is a legal and moral imperative. **Czechia** focused on the grave human rights situation in the temporarily occupied Crimea as a consequence of Russia's war against Ukraine. The high numbers of arbitrary arrests and detentions of civilians on political grounds are alarming.

The **Syrian Arab Republic** condemned the systematic attacks on Russian territories by Ukraine. **Along with the DPRK, Eritrea, and Venezuela**, reiterated that the HC's report reflects the Western states' attempts to turn Agenda Item 10 into a tool to achieve their anti-Russian political agenda underpinned by politicized decisions or resolutions and unfounded reports. This is an obvious manifestation of politicization and double standards. Politicization, selectivity, and double standards do nothing to contribute to improving human rights around the world and do not bring any benefits to vulnerable people or groups. **Nicaragua** rejected the report of the HC on Ukraine and the SG's report on the situation of human rights in Crimea which is not aligned with reality and maliciously seek to distort the truth. Indeed, the report was based on biased information and impartial analysis, added **Belarus**, including the untrue, politically motivated speculation and disinformation on Ukrainian children. **Nicaragua** categorically rejected the biased approach and defended Crimea as an integral part of Russia. It also denounced the crimes by Ukraine with regular attacks against Russian territories. It condemned the torture and summary executions of Russian POWs and violations of believers' rights.

China focused on intense consultations with countries, including Russia and Ukraine, to play an active role in solving the crisis. The top priority must be promoting dialogue negotiation and political settlement to the crisis, respecting all countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

UNICEF reaffirmed that children remain the most vulnerable to its far-reaching impact. The psychological impact of the conflict on children in Ukraine is already acute. It called for immediate compliance with international human rights law and humanitarian law and the end of grave violations against children.

The Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that since the beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (2014), citizens of Ukraine in temporarily occupied Crimea have been unjustly accused of crimes in prisons. Human rights defenders, journalists, and activists are systematically prosecuted in Crimea due to their ethnic origin and religion, beliefs, and views. It demanded urgent access to the places of detention of all Ukrainian prisoners. **The majority of NGOs** were alarmed by the documented number of civilians who have been arbitrarily detained by the Russian Federation. They stood in solidarity with the people of Ukraine who are

suffering from the ongoing warrant of aggression by the Russian Federation which is causing tragedies, great violations, and inhumane nuclear threats. They called on the international community to support the cease-fire and peace negotiation. **Human Rights Research Leagues** urged the international community to support Ukraine in its efforts to repatriate those heavily wounded and seriously ill, pressure Russia to release illegally detained noncombatants, release women from captivity, stop unfair court proceedings in which Russia submits Ukrainian POWs, and ensure justice. **The Center for Global Non-Killing** asserted that the International Criminal Court plays a key role. Its initial arrest warrants focused on child deportations and attacks on infrastructure, but future charges should address sexual violence, holding commanders accountable for these crimes. Justice alone is not enough. Survivors need urgent medical, psychological, and economic support to rebuild their lives.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (46 country delegations):

Latvia, EU, Denmark (on behalf of a group of friends), Ireland, Liechtenstein, Poland, Türkiye, Netherlands, Portugal, Czechia, Japan, Canada, Georgia, Australia, Republic of Korea, Germany, USA, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain, France, Croatia, Malta, Syrian Arab Republic, Cyprus, North-Macedonia, China, Albania, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Belarus, Bulgaria, Austria, UK, Switzerland, Romania, Venezuela, Eritrea, New Zealand, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Argentina, Slovakia, Greece, Italy, Nicaragua.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

Ukraine Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, CPTI, War International, Human Rights Research Leagues, World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organization, Human Rights House Foundation, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, VSJ ZMOGAUS TEISIU APSAUGA, Legal Action Worldwide, Center for Global Non-Killing, public organization, public advocacy.

International organizations (1): UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to the UN WEB TV: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).