

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 57th SESSION

### Interactive dialogue following an oral update on the findings in the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Ukraine

08 October 2024

**Mr Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, in his opening remark, affirmed the approaching 1,000 days since the Russian Federation's full-scale armed attack on Ukraine, a period marked by massive destruction, death and injury, displaced and tormented families and widespread violations of international law. This war has quickly become a tragic, flagrant example of the devastation of war on people, the environment, and the common future, leaving a legacy of trauma and loss for generations to come.

At the same time, insidious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law continue in places of detention hidden from the view of independent monitors. The prohibition of torture under international law is absolute and yet patterns of widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war at the hands of Russian captors have been recounted to my office across internment facilities in numerous regions within occupied territory and the Russian Federation.

Almost all of the prisoners of war interviewed have provided detailed and consistent accounts of torture or ill-treatment in the custody of Russian forces throughout all stages of captivity. He reported that 119 out of 169 Ukrainian POWs interviewed confessed to suffering acts of sexual violence including rape, attempted rape, and all kinds of other horrible things inflicted on them. Minimum safeguards that are meant to help prevent torture such as allowing prisoners to communicate with the outside world, access by independent monitors, or routine medical exams have been absent or ineffective.

Dehumanizing rhetoric has continued by public figures in the Russian Federation calling for inhumane treatment and even execution of Ukrainian POWs and Russian service persons benefit from broad amnesty laws that fuel impunity. Perpetrators of this horrific practice must be held to account. **The return of prisoners of war** to their homes and families is a top priority but as long as they are detained, the standards that apply must be properly implemented in order to achieve this better.

He encouraged Ukraine to ensure that POWs are treated in accordance with international law at all stages of their captivity.

The Russian Armed Forces continued their systematic attacks on Ukrainian critical energy infrastructure launching at least four major waves of attacks over three months increasingly against power generation facilities. These attacks have significantly decreased Ukraine's power generation capacity.

People already experienced rolling blackouts over the summer and the situation risks deteriorating over the brutal winter period when demand increases. This is a vicious way of harming civilians, especially in a heavily urbanized country like Ukraine with centralized electricity and heating systems. Electricity is nothing short of a lifeblood for hospitals otherwise forced to rely on backup generators, for heating and water supply at homes, for elevators critical to enabling older people or people with disabilities to reach their apartments, for treating groundwater to avoid the spread of infectious diseases. This harm is entirely foreseeable, avoidable, and unacceptable.

The HC raised attention to a less visible side of this conflict, its pernicious damage to and cost to the environment. The war is steadily poisoning the land and natural habitats in Ukraine, contaminating air, groundwater, and soil including that used for agriculture. Active fighting near nuclear power stations and attacks on related infrastructures increase the risk of nuclear instability and accidents which could have serious transborder consequences.

Scientists warn that conflict can remake ecosystems entirely.

The full consequences of this are far from unknown in Ukraine. **Efforts to seek accountability and peace must also take full account of these concerns** in light of their deeply damaging long-term effect on Ukrainians today and future generations. It is absolutely critical to ensure accountability and durable peace through dialogue and diplomacy. It is also important to investigate and prosecute all alleged violations of international law and international human rights law.

While the OHCHR has pursued access to territory occupied by the Russian Federation and all affected areas in the Russian Federation to be able to document and monitor the human rights situation; he regretted that the Russian Federation has not granted such access until now.

**The Russian Federation did not wish to take the floor as the country concerned.**

**Ukraine (Country concerned)** affirmed that as today marks the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the international community is still witnessing a great breach by the Russian Federation. Moreover, through its recent spike in missile terror against Ukrainian people in the critical infrastructure, Russia continues to trample on the UN charter and international law. Time and again Russia shows no regard for human life, mercilessly striking at the heart of our most vulnerable infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and energy supplies.

With winter approaching, it seeks to plunge every Ukrainian into darkness and cold by attacking our hydropower plants and energy facilities. Russia also continues to expose the whole world to a **nuclear threat** with complete disregard for the fact that any critical incident in the energy system of Ukraine can lead to a nuclear disaster.

Russia's war takes a devastating toll on the lives of millions of Ukrainian **children**, putting them in grave danger of physical and emotional harm. Forcible transfers and deportations, camps for political indoctrination, military training, illegal adoption, and the Russian occupation have turned their worst nightmares into reality.

These same motives guide the Russian military command to issue orders for executions of **Ukrainian prisoners of war**. Any summary execution constitutes a war crime, and it shall not be subject to any statute of limitations. Ukraine persisted in seeking justice until all perpetrators were held accountable.

In conclusion, it affirmed that while Ukraine takes all necessary measures provided by law and in conformity with its international obligations to protect the rights and freedoms of all citizens of Ukraine, Russia continues to weaponize religion and use its Orthodox Church to justify and sanctify war of aggression against Ukraine and to infringe upon the spiritual independence of Ukraine.

Russia must be forced to seek peace and not at Ukraine's expense but a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in line with the principles of the UN charter and Ukraine's peace formula with full respect for international law and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders.

## Interactive dialogue

44 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries affirmed that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has reached unprecedented levels including deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure. They condemned Russia's illegal and unprovoked war against Ukraine and Russia's continuing violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine.** Countries urged Russia to abide by its obligations under international law and seize its aggression against Ukraine entirely unconditionally and immediately. **Additionally, Sweden** reported three steps to ensure accountability: the first is human rights monitoring, evidence gathering, and investigations carried out by Ukrainian authorities, other states, and international organizations (Commission of Inquiry, special tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, and the International Criminal Court); secondly, steps to establish an international compensation mechanism for the damage that Russia's aggression has caused; and thirdly, uphold international law and the UN charter and denounce aggression.

**The EU, Austria, Moldova, Romania, Chile, the UK, Netherlands, Czechia, Italy, the United States, Malta, and Ireland, among others,** condemned and remained alarmed by the widespread and systematic use of torture, ill-treatment, summary execution, and sexual violence against Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees in their captivity, including severe beating, suffocation, electric shocks, and mock executions added by **Poland**. **The Sovereign Order of Malta and Switzerland** insisted in particular on the vital protection of humanitarian aid workers and medical centers in conflict zones. As denounced by **Portugal**, the Russian Federation carried out a series of missile and loitering attacks against energy infrastructure in Ukraine. This has resulted in a significant energy power deficit which will undoubtedly have a considerable impact on civilians this winter.

**Generally speaking, countries** agreed that the lack of accountability is worrisome and repeated their call to bring all perpetrators to justice. All victims have the right to justice, truth, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition.

**On the other hand, the Syrian Arab Republic, Belarus, China, and Venezuela** stressed that the current debate and related resolution distorts the essential mandate of technical assistance and capacity building and reduces increasingly establishing a scenario of instrumentalization for the geopolitical interests of a specific group. All reports before the HRC should be based on the objective balance in partial assessments on the grounds. The **DPRK** added that this is a manifestation of politicization and double standards. The **Russian Federation** urged Ukrainian authorities to comply with this international humanitarian rights obligation, as well as the international community to pay attention to serious violations of human rights by the Ukrainian regime. **Nicaragua** reiterated its firm and unconditional support for its sister federation of Russia.

**UNICEF** reported data and figures on deaths and injuries of children since the beginning of the school year. Reported also that attacks on schools continue unabated with educational facilities in at least five different regions. Attacks on energy infrastructure further disrupt learning and significantly impact the ability of children and families to access the services upon which they rely. Called for immediate compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and the end of grave violations against children.

**The NHRI Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights** reported that in the occupied territories of Ukraine, Russia conducts murders, illegal detentions, and kidnappings of civilians, and creates filtration camps where civilians are subjected to interrogation, humiliation, and torture. Russia committed an act of genocide aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity. Thousands of Ukrainian

children were illegally taken to the territory of Russia. The majority of **NGOs** affirmed their support for the people of Ukraine suffering from Russian aggression, conscription mandatory military registration in the occupied territories. They urged Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine, detention for refusal to fight, and military indoctrination in schools. The **Human Rights Research League** reported that Ukrainians are judged for their national identity, the Ukrainian language, and political views. They are subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (44 country delegations):

*Sweden (on behalf of a group of countries - H. E. Ms. Maria Malmer Stenergard, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden), European Union, Russian Federation (on behalf of a group of countries), Czechia, Sovereign Order of Malta, Switzerland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Italy, United States of America, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Portugal, Poland, France, Japan, Austria, Luxembourg, Republic of Korea, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Canada, Republic of Moldova, Romania, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Spain, Albania, Bulgaria, Uruguay, Belarus, Georgia, Cyprus, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), China, Türkiye, Montenegro, Croatia, Syrian Arab Republic, Nicaragua, Argentina, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Russian Federation, Chile, Cabo Verde.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (12):

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, VšĮ "Žmogaus teisių apsauga", War Resisters International, Public Organization "Public Advocacy", Human Rights Research League, United Nations Watch, Human Rights House Foundation, iuventum e.V.,

International organization: UNICEF.

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