



## 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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First of all, I would like to join you in paying tribute to Maryna Fenina, an OSCE employee, who was tragically killed during Russia's aerial bombardment of Ukraine. We again offer our heartfelt condolences to her family and friends.

Colleagues, as Elie Wiesel famously said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "I swore never to be silent whenever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Whenever men and women are prosecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe."

Colleagues, Ukraine must remain at the center of our universe. The human suffering that Ukrainians endure at the hands of their Russian occupiers only continues. Over the past two years, ODIHR, the United Nations, civil society organizations, and journalists have described in shockingly graphic terms Russian armed forces' and other Russian authorities' unlawful detention and ill treatment of Ukrainian civilians. Witnesses and survivors have provided accounts of torture that literally make us cringe, as well as of incommunicado detentions and executions. We cannot allow this brutality and cruelty to become normalized. We're not just speaking of a few reports of mistreatment: we're seeing it over and over and over again.

As we speak in this Council, Russian forces continue to detain thousands of civilians, in many cases holding them in improvised facilities before transferring them to areas of Ukraine under Russian occupation or to Russia. According to various reports, the unlawful transfer and deportation of persons often happens for such supposed transgressions as speaking the Ukrainian language, expressing support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, or simply by virtue of being related to someone serving in the Ukrainian military. Detainees in these documented cases are reportedly accorded no access to lawyers or due process under law, subjected to torture and ill treatment, including sexual violence, and denied necessary medical care. As Human Rights Watch and various media have exposed, the Russian Federation forcibly conscripts some of these detainees into the Russian military. Russian authorities often keep families of Ukrainian detainees in the dark as to the location and health of their loved ones, even about whether their relatives are dead or alive.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 864 individual cases of arbitrary detention perpetrated by the Russian Federation between February 2022 and May 2023, many of which OHCHR notes also amounted to enforced disappearances. The Ukrainian NGO the Media Initiative for Human Rights, or MIHR, identified 1,168 cases of civilians held in the Russian Federation as of May 2023, estimating that the actual number could be five to seven times greater. MIHR also identified over 80 active detention facilities in Russia and the occupied areas of Ukraine used to hold civilians. OHCHR also found two locations in Belarus used by Russia's armed forces as temporary or transit places of detention, providing yet further evidence of the Lukashenka regime's role in Russia's war. And we have not seen any evidence that the number of civilian detainees has decreased over time. Just the opposite.

The testimonials of former detainees and their family members are heartbreaking. For example, Tetyana Sytnyk is still trying to determine the fate of her brother Serhii, a young man from the town of Trostyanets. After Russian soldiers took him from his house on March 16, 2022, his family received no information about his whereabouts. Two months later, a returned Ukrainian prisoner of war told Tetyana that he had been held together with Serhii, who had been deported to Russia. Despite her unflagging efforts, nearly two years after he was taken, Tetyana still has not managed to find any additional information about her brother. This is one of countless stories.

To take another example, OHCHR documented the case of a woman from the Kherson region whom Russian soldiers detained on July 31, 2022, who described Russian soldiers accusing her of passing information to her brother in the Ukrainian military. These soldiers took her from her home and brought her to a facility in the Mykolaiv region where they held her for three days while they brutally interrogated and beat her. Transferred yet again, she was held incommunicado until mid-September. Russian Federal Security Service officers interrogated and tortured her, subjecting her to sexual violence and threatening her with rape. Colleagues, this is but one of countless accounts of ill treatment of Ukrainian civilians.

Just read through ODIHR's December 12, 2023 report documenting violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine and you will find countless similar accounts from Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhya.

Madam Chair, we will hold Russia to account for the atrocities it continues to commit. The OSCE must remain a place where we call out Russia for its unconscionable actions. This includes its continued detention of OSCE officials Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov, and Dmytro Shabanov. Russia must provide the Permanent Council with information on these individuals' whereabouts and wellbeing now, without delay.

We want to commend Foreign Minister Borg for the focus during his February 3rd visit to Ukraine on civilian detainees. As he noted, the OSCE has a variety of tools at its disposal, including the Moscow Mechanism, to document violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. The OSCE also has the Support Program for Ukraine to help strengthen Ukraine's institutions and assist civilian populations affected by the war. During this visit, President Zelenskyy identified the return of children and civilian detainees as one of his top priorities. I want you all to know, it's a top priority for the United States as well.

I've been calling on this organization to take action in this area for well over a year, and I'm not going to get tired of raising our collective responsibility to act. Let's not just talk, let's do something.

As you saw last Friday, my country continues to impose sanctions on those involved in the forcible transfer and/or deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, Belarus, and Russia-occupied Crimea. The OSCE has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to lead on such issues, to channel our collective political will to identify and bring Ukrainian children and civilian detainees home, and to help all those caught in Russia's vicious war. I am confident our organization will step up to this challenge. Rest assured, colleagues, the United States is committed to doing our share to meet the moment.

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