

ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE NGO «UNION OF RELATIVES  
OF KREMLIN POLITICAL PRISONERS»

**IN DOCUMENTING  
RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES  
AGAINST CIVILIANS  
IN UKRAINE**

**APRIL 2026**

# CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b>	2
<b>METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES</b>	3
<b>1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE BODY OF TESTIMONIES</b>	5
<b>2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTION</b>	6
<b>3. PROFILE OF THE VICTIMS</b>	8
<b>4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND LEGAL QUALIFICATION OF CRIMES</b>	9
<b>5. CHAINS OF TRANSFER</b>	12
<b>6. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION</b>	16
<b>7. COURT PROCEEDINGS AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL</b>	17
<b>8. INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT</b>	19
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	21
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	23
<b>ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AND CUMULATIVE INDICATORS</b>	26

## SUMMARY

The analytical review for April 2026 was prepared on the basis of an analysis of 16 testimonies concerning unlawful deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, torture, coercion to cooperate, unlawful transfer, filtration, deportation and politically motivated persecution in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and in places of detention in the Russian Federation. The material covers events from 2019 to 2025, with the largest number of initial detentions recorded in 2022 – nine of the 16 cases.

Among the 16 main victims, 13 men and three women were documented. Men were most often persecuted for alleged involvement in resistance, service, or a previous connection with the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) or the Armed Forces of Ukraine, family ties to military personnel, suspicions of passing coordinates, participation in pro-Ukrainian actions, volunteering, or civic activity. In cases involving women as direct victims, more specific gender-based international crimes and forms of persecution were documented: conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), sexualised threats, persecution because of family ties with a serviceman, psychological pressure through children, seizure of documents and forced transfer. At the time of documentation, 14 documented persons had been released, while two remained imprisoned.

Geographically, the body of data is predominantly linked to Zaporizhzhia Oblast: 12 of the 16 cases concern the detention, holding, or transfer of persons from Melitopol, Polohy, and Berdiansk districts, as well as from Enerhodar, Tokmak, Prymorsk, Yakymivka, Chernihivka, Novodanylivka, Molochansk, and other communities. Three cases are linked to Donetsk Oblast, including Donetsk, Makiivka and Olenivka, and one to Luhansk, followed by prolonged transfer through occupation and Russian penitentiary institutions.

In most documented cases, the data indicate a high level of violence and the systematic nature of detention practices. Indications of torture or other severe physical violence against the main victim were directly recorded in more than half of the cases. The use of electric shocks against the detained person or members of their family was described in at least seven cases. Indications of conflict-related sexual violence, sexualised torture or threats of sexual violence were recorded in four cases, including contextual information about sexualised violence against other detainees. Formalised criminal prosecution by the Russian Federation or occupation structures was recorded in at least six cases, including sentences of six, 13 and 16 years, as well as life imprisonment. Unlawful transfer, staged transfer or prolonged detention in the Russian Federation was recorded in at least eight cases.

Several illustrative cases require particular attention: the detention of a city mayor after his father had effectively been taken hostage; the case of a serviceman's wife in Berdiansk who, after applying to the commandant's office, was unlawfully detained, beaten and subjected to sexual violence

(CRSV); the case of a man with a disability from Melitopol, who was reported to have later been held in Rostov-on-Don; the forced deportation of a woman from Yakymivka district after administrative pressure; and the testimony of a prisoner of war about civilians being held together with military personnel.

Taken together, the testimonies demonstrate a recurring pattern of conduct by representatives of the Russian Federation, the FSB, so-called MGB structures, occupation police, military units, Rosgvardia and occupation administrations: searches, detention without notification of grounds, seizure of phones and documents, concealment of whereabouts, interrogations with physical and psychological violence, coercion into self-incrimination or cooperation, threats against relatives, and detention in basements, garages, administrative premises, pre-trial detention centres, colonies, filtration points and institutions in the Russian Federation. In legal terms, the acts described bear indications of the war crimes of unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, inhuman treatment and unlawful transfer of civilians. Where evidence of widespread and systematic conduct is available, they may also be considered in the context of crimes against humanity.

## **METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES**

The analytical review was prepared on the basis of a qualitative analysis of 16 semi-structured interviews collected by documenters of the NGO 'Union of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners' in April 2026. The sources of information were direct testimonies of persons who had been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty, as well as detailed testimonies from their relatives, who are searching for the disappeared or remain in regular contact with detained persons.

For this review, the main unit of analysis is a single primary case or a single primary person in respect of whom testimony was provided. At the same time, one of the 16 materials is the testimony of a prisoner of war, who also provided important information about civilians held together with prisoners of war. The body of material, therefore, covers 15 primary civilian cases and one witness case involving a person who was himself in captivity and described the conditions of civilian detention in places of detention.

By source of information, 14 testimonies were provided directly by persons who survived unlawful detention, torture, filtration, deportation and deprivation of personal liberty. Two testimonies were provided by relatives of persons who, at the time of documentation, remained deprived of liberty or about whom families did not have complete information. This source structure allows combining direct testimonies from released persons with data on those who remain under the control of occupation structures or the Russian Federation's penitentiary system.

The testimonies were collected in accordance with the principles of informed consent, respondent safety and anonymisation of personal data. In 14 cases,

testimony was provided directly by persons released from unlawful detention; in two cases, by their close relatives or witnesses. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international human rights law, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the Additional Protocols thereto, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention against Torture.

In addition to direct testimonies, the analysis drew on materials from criminal proceedings whose existence or content was reported by interviewees, including extracts from the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations, notices from investigative authorities and procedural documents. It also used copies of medical documents, decisions or materials of de facto 'courts' of the occupation administrations, and notices of detention or transfer mentioned or provided by victims.

The analysis also took into account open-source data cited by witnesses, including media publications, reports by human rights organisations, information from international organisations, including the ICRC, and responses from Ukrainian state bodies to information requests submitted by victims' relatives regarding the whereabouts, status or search for persons unlawfully deprived of their liberty. The combined use of these sources enabled cross-verification of certain facts, identification of common patterns, and preparation of a general analytical review in accordance with the standards for documenting violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law.

# 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE BODY OF TESTIMONIES

The analysed testimonies concern at least 16 victims of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty in 2019 (1), 2020 (1), 2021 (1), 2022 (9), 2023 (1), 2024 (2) and 2025 (1). The April body of testimonies is characterised by significant internal diversity. However, almost all cases share several common features. These include the absence of lawful and clearly stated grounds for detention; initial concealment of whereabouts; the use of violence or threats; seizure of means of communication; isolation from family; and the subsequent efforts of occupation structures either to obtain information, force a person to cooperate, or formalise persecution through a fabricated or politically motivated case.

In some cases, detention occurred before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including in Donetsk and in the occupied territories of Donetsk Oblast. These cases show that the practice of abducting civilians, holding them in MGB facilities, Izoliatsiia, pre-trial detention centres and subjecting them to torture had been formed earlier and, after 2022, effectively spread to the newly occupied territories. Most testimonies, however, concern events in 2022 in southern Ukraine, where occupation forces rapidly introduced a system of control over communities through searches, checkpoints, commandant's offices, basements, seized administrative buildings and a network of unofficial places of detention.

In at least three cases, a repeated pattern of detentions or prolonged pressure was recorded. One victim, from the temporarily occupied territory of the Melitopol district, reported three separate detentions connected with family ties to a serviceman, suspicions of passing information and the contents of a phone. Another victim, from the temporarily occupied territory of Polohy district, reported three detentions during 2022, accompanied by beatings, electric shocks and coercion to testify about other persons. Another victim, from the temporarily occupied territory of the Melitopol district, described a long process of administrative persecution, checks, seizure of equipment, interrogations and eventual forced removal from the occupied territory.

Among the motives for detention by occupation forces, whether directly or indirectly reflected in the testimonies, the most frequent were suspicion of a pro-Ukrainian position, participation in protests, transfer of information to the Ukrainian side or suspicion of such transfer, service in the ATO or family ties with military personnel, refusal to cooperate with the occupation authorities, certain contacts in a phone, participation in volunteer chats, and professional or civic activity. In several cases, a property-related motive is visible: interest in an apartment, seizure of equipment, pressure related to a business, money or valuable property. In some cases, detention appears to have been a way to intimidate the wider community by targeting a visible or vulnerable person.

An important feature of the body of material is the combination of individual

and collective dimensions. Even where testimony concerns one person, it almost always reveals a broader context of war crimes. Witnesses report other detainees in basements, cells, garages, pre-trial detention centres, colonies, filtration premises, camps and during transport stages. Taken together, the material contains more than 30 individualised, semi-individualised or non-individualised references to other victims, as well as numerous references to dozens of people in cells, hundreds of people in barracks or an unspecified number of detainees who were constantly brought in and taken away.

This means that the 16 testimonies cannot be treated as 16 isolated events. They reflect fragments of a broader system in which different occupation units and structures performed interconnected functions: the military carried out initial searches and detentions; the FSB, MGB or other special-service structures conducted interrogations and torture; the occupation police and commandant's offices provided local detention infrastructure; administrative and migration authorities issued deportation decisions; penitentiary institutions of the Russian Federation and occupation administrations ensured prolonged detention; and judicial bodies 'legitimised' persecution through sentences.

## **2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTION**

The largest number of documented detentions occurred in the temporarily occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. Twelve cases are connected to this territory, allowing tracing an extensive network of places of detention and holding in Melitopol, Molochansk, Tokmak, Prymorsk, Berdiansk, Enerhodar, Yakymivka, Chernihivka, Novopoltavka, Novodanylivka, Ocheretuvate, and Polohy, as well as in the Melitopol districts. The Zaporizhzhia cases demonstrate a broad range of pretexts for persecution: refusal to cooperate with the occupation administration, participation in rallies, veteran status, family ties with military personnel, suspicions of passing coordinates, the presence of pro-Ukrainian chats, volunteer activity, entries in a phone, property interests, or simply the fact of living in a community that occupation forces were trying to subordinate.

Four cases are connected with the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. One describes the prolonged detention of a student in the MGB, Izoliatsiia and MGB pre-trial detention system. Another concerns a person who was detained in Donetsk before the full-scale invasion and later passed through Izoliatsiia, the MGB, a pre-trial detention centre, court procedures and transfer stages. One case begins in Luhansk and demonstrates a long chain from local detention to MGB basements, colonies, pre-trial detention centres, the bringing of charges into line with Russian criminal law, and transfer to a colony in Perm Krai. It is important for understanding how the occupation's legal constructions of the so-called republics were later integrated into the Russian criminal-executive system.

The total number of documented cases of arbitrary detention and deprivation of personal liberty by territory was:

**Temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast (10):**

- Berdiansk district (1);
- Enerhodar (1);
- Melitopol district (5);
- Polohy district (5).

**Temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast (3):**

- Donetsk district (2);
- Pokrovsk district (1).

**Temporarily occupied territory of Luhansk Oblast (1):**

- Luhansk district (1).

In terms of the immediate circumstances of detention, searches at homes or detention near the place of residence predominated. At least ten cases contain indications of detention at home, in a yard, near an apartment or in the immediate vicinity of housing. Such detentions usually took place early in the morning or at night, involving armed personnel, equipment, several vehicles, people in balaclavas, and persons without insignia. During searches, phones, computers, documents, equipment, data carriers and, in some cases, property of material value were seized. In some cases, the search was effectively a way to intimidate the family and demonstrate control, rather than a procedural action.

Another group of cases is connected with checkpoints, commandant's offices, or a person voluntarily arriving at a place where they were then effectively detained. For example, one victim came to the place where his father was being held and was also detained. Another case concerns a victim who was stopped at a checkpoint while attempting to leave; that checkpoint became the entry point into a long chain of torture and transfer. In one incident, the wife of a serviceman went to a commandant's office to obtain an exit permit, but was unlawfully detained and subjected to violence.

The circumstances of detention also indicate the targeted search for categories of the population whom occupation forces regarded as disloyal. Witnesses repeatedly reported that the occupiers were looking for ATO participants, military personnel, former law enforcement officers, members of territorial defence, activists, volunteers, local government representatives, people with a pro-Ukrainian position, persons with contacts in the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the SBU, relatives of military personnel and people who might have information about the movement of occupation equipment. At the same time, a significant proportion of abductions or arrests were unrelated to the victims' activities: people were detained because another person named them, because of an old message on a phone, participation in a rally, a chat entry, a list that looked suspicious to the occupiers, a property interest or simply because of the need to produce 'statistics'.

### **3. PROFILE OF THE VICTIMS**

The profile of victims in the April body of testimony shows that the practice of unlawful deprivation of liberty was not directed against a single social or professional group. On the contrary, persecution affected a broad range of civilians. Victims include a local self-government official, a feldsher, farmers, private entrepreneurs, a student, a gas utility worker, an ATO veteran, a pensioner, the wife of a serviceman, a woman involved in volunteer and pro-Ukrainian activity, a person with a disability, a driver at an agricultural enterprise and civilians whose occupation structures are accused of involvement in resistance. This diversity shows that the criterion for persecution was not actual participation in hostilities, but the perception of a person as potentially disloyal, useful for obtaining information, or suitable for intimidating the community.

From a gender perspective, men make up 12 of the 16 main cases. This corresponds to the typical profile of occupation detentions, in which men were more often suspected of links with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the ATO, territorial defence, passing coordinates, storing weapons or participating in resistance. However, the four cases involving documented women are particularly important. They reveal specific forms of violence: conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); persecution because of family status; intimidation through children; searches of homes and forced seizure of documents; coercion to sign documents; administrative expulsion from occupied territory; and psychological pressure aimed at destroying social ties and the possibility of remaining in the community.

Among the victims are young men, students or persons around the age of 20; middle-aged people with professional or family responsibilities; older persons; and people with disabilities or serious health conditions. In several cases, children or minors were not the main detainees but were present during searches or were used as an element of pressure on parents. In one episode, threats concerned the wife and child of a city mayor. In another case, armed persons searched a house where the victim's minor son was present. In the case of the serviceman's wife, threats of sexual violence also concerned children, intensifying the psychological nature of the torture.

Professional and social status often served as the basis for heightened attention within occupational structures. The city mayor was deliberately detained because of his position and the possibility that he could legitimise the occupation administration. Farmers and agricultural workers were seen as people with local resources, transport, connections and potential influence in the community. ATO veterans were automatically placed in the category of 'dangerous' persons or 'patriots'. Workers in municipal, gas, medical or other infrastructure had access to local information and could be valuable for occupation control. Students and young men from Donetsk and Melitopol were persecuted because of Ukrainian education, pro-Ukrainian views, family ties or suspicion of disloyalty.

Persons with disabilities or serious health problems constitute a separate vulnerable group. One case concerns a man with a disability, about whom a close

person reported likely detention in Melitopol basements and later in Rostov-on-Don. In several other cases, disability or serious deterioration of health arose after torture, injuries, beatings or prolonged detention. A victim detained at a checkpoint had a leg wound, numerous injuries, heart problems, hearing loss, memory and balance problems, and later acquired a disability. Other witnesses reported broken ribs, stomach bleeding, cranio-cerebral consequences, sleep problems, anxiety, panic attacks and the need for psychiatric or psychological support.

#### **4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND LEGAL QUALIFICATION OF CRIMES**

The April body of documented international crimes enables the identification of several interconnected groups of violations. **The first and basic group** is the unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians, or the documentation of such deprivation of liberty through a witness. In all documented cases, detentions took place without due legal procedure, without a clear notification of the grounds, without access to an independent lawyer, without the possibility of promptly informing the family and without effective judicial control. Even in cases where a formal article or court later appeared, the initial period was informalised, isolated and violent.

**The second group** is enforced disappearance or incommunicado detention. In most cases, relatives did not know for some time where the detained person was, or received denials from the occupation authorities. In the case of the victim from Enerhodar, the family had no information about his whereabouts for approximately five months. In the case of the man with a disability from Melitopol, there was no official information for a prolonged period, and confirmation of his likely detention came fragmentarily through indirect sources. In the case of the driver from Polohy district, his whereabouts remained unknown for a long time; it later emerged that he had been held in Mariupol, Simferopol, and Rostov-on-Don. This practice corresponds to the classic pattern of enforced disappearance: deprivation of liberty by representatives of the state or structures associated with it, followed by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the person.

**The third group** is torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Direct indications of torture or severe physical violence are present in at least 11 cases. Witnesses describe beatings with fists, feet, rifle butts, bottles, pipes and batons; blows to the head, ribs, abdomen and legs; being placed against a wall or on their knees; mock executions; shots fired near the ear; being forced to dig one's own grave; broken ribs; knocked-out or damaged teeth; bleeding; loss of consciousness; detention in cold conditions; hunger; and deprivation of sleep and medical care. In several cases, torture was systematic and repeated daily or over several stages of detention.

The use of electric shocks as a separate method of torture requires particular

attention. Such information is directly recorded in at least seven testimonies. Electric current was applied to fingers and toes, genitals, ears, chest and other parts of the body, sometimes with water poured over the victim to intensify the pain. Some testimonies mention field telephones, 'tapiks', wires, dynamo devices or other electrical apparatus. Electric torture was used as a tool to obtain information about weapons, 'patriots', coordinates, links with the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the SBU, and sometimes as a form of punishment or intimidation without any clear purpose.

**The fourth group** is conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), including sexualised forms of torture. Four primary cases contain direct indications of such violence or threats. The gravest case concerns a woman who, after applying to a commandant's office in Berdiansk, was beaten, held in an unknown place, subjected to sexual violence by a group of men, forced nudity, sexualised threats, physical injury and humiliation. The testimony indicates that the violence was not only sexual but also distinctly misogynistic: the perpetrators openly reduced the woman to an object of sexual use, called women 'a piece of meat', said women should only be raped and forced to give birth, and demonstratively ignored her pain, bleeding, pleas and resistance.

This rhetoric indicates the dehumanisation of the victim, specifically as a woman, the denial of her agency, bodily autonomy and right to consent. Forced complete nudity, being kept naked in front of a group of men, touching of her breasts, legs and crotch, sexualised comments, forcing her to 'scream', orders to 'enjoy it' and demands for sexual arousal during pain and violence point to an attempt not only to inflict physical harm but also to impose on the victim a humiliating role as a sexual object deprived of freedom, voice and control over her own body.

Violent interference in the reproductive sphere should be examined separately. The perpetrators inserted their hands into the victim's crotch, asked about an intrauterine device, and then ripped it out, causing bleeding. This episode bears indications of reproductive violence and is particularly significant from the perspective of misogynistic control over a woman's body. It combines sexual violence, physical injury, humiliation and violent interference with a woman's ability to control her reproductive health independently. Threats to bring the children, rape the victim in their presence and force the children to watch indicate the use of motherhood as a separate tool of psychological torture.

Particularly grave are the statements concerning the victim's minor daughter, which contained threats of sexual violence against a child and claims that she was already old enough to be raped so that she would 'give birth to a new nation'. These words indicate a combination of misogyny, sexualised violence, reproductive coercion and the colonial-occupation logic of control over the bodies of women and girls. In this context, women appear to the perpetrators not as civilians protected by international humanitarian law, but as objects of punishment, sexual domination, reproductive control and intimidation of their families. The group nature of the violence, the

perpetrators' laughter, their conversations among themselves about 'who' they would rape, and the participation of several men in the humiliation and violence indicate the normalisation of misogynistic attitudes within occupation structures and the use of sexual violence as a collective tool of terror.

The same testimony describes sexual violence against another older woman, who, according to the victim, was also tortured and raped in the same place. Forcing the main victim to witness this violence intensified the psychological pressure and demonstrated the systematic humiliation of women as a group. This case should therefore be examined not merely as a separate episode of rape or torture, but as a complex manifestation of CRSV in which sexual violence, physical torture, reproductive violence, threats against children, misogynistic dehumanisation and humiliation of women's dignity were interconnected elements of one mechanism of coercion, punishment and intimidation. Other cases also contain threats of rape, sexualised humiliation, the application of electric shocks to men's genitals, threats to cut off genitals or to 'hand over' a woman to other units. These episodes show that sexualised violence was used not only to cause physical pain, but also as a way to destroy dignity, control and intimidate.

**The fifth group** is coercion to cooperate or self-incriminate. In the case of the city mayor, occupation structures directly proposed that he continue performing his duties under their control, including formally under a Ukrainian signboard but in fact in the interests of the occupation authorities. A police officer held in the same cell was offered the opportunity to head the so-called 'people's militia'. In other cases, victims were forced to sign documents, name 'patriots', confess to transmitting data, agree to Russian versions of events or complete documents whose contents they were not allowed to read. Coercion to cooperate was often accompanied by threats against the family.

**The sixth group** is the use of relatives as a tool of pressure. The most obvious example is the case of the city mayor's father, who was detained to force the official himself to come to the occupiers. In one case, persecution affected not only the primary victim but also his mother, her husband and the detainee's girlfriend. In the cases of veterans and farmers, the occupiers threatened to imprison children, wives or other close relatives. In the case of the serviceman's wife, sexualised threats directly concerned their children. This practice indicates the use of family vulnerability within a repressive technology.

**The seventh group** is unlawful transfer, filtration and deportation. At least eight cases involve staged transfers or movements to the Russian Federation or through its territory, including colonies, pre-trial detention centres, filtration points, Rostov-on-Don, Orsk, Perm Krai, and other regions, as well as routes through Belarus or Georgia. A separate case recorded the forced removal of a woman from the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia Oblast through the territory of the Russian Federation to the Georgian border. This type of movement indicates an unlawful forced transfer or deportation carried out without the

person's free, informed and safe consent.

**The eighth group** is unlawful criminal prosecution and violations of the right to a fair trial. In at least six cases, the testimonies contain data about formalised proceedings, an article, a court, a sentence or preparations for a trial. In four cases, convictions were reported: 13 years, six years, 16 years and life imprisonment. These proceedings display typical violations: lack of access to effective defence at the initial stage; lawyers acting as channels of communication rather than as genuine defence; absence of documents for relatives; courts of occupation structures or the Russian Federation; fear of filing an appeal because of the risk of worsening the situation; and the bringing of articles of occupation entities into line with Russian law without the real participation of the person concerned.

Taken together, the violations described bear indications of war crimes, including unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, unlawful transfer of civilians, unlawful sentencing and denial of the right to a fair trial. If widespread or systematic conduct, as well as a policy or organised practice, is established, these acts may also be considered as crimes against humanity: enforced disappearance, torture, persecution on political grounds, imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law, and, in respect of sexual violence, the relevant forms of sexual violence as an international crime.

## **5. CHAINS OF TRANSFER**

Analysis of the documented testimonies makes it possible to trace the systematic nature of the transfer of unlawfully detained civilians both within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and across Ukraine's state border into the territory of the Russian Federation. In many cases, transfer was not merely a logistical act, but also a means of disorientation, isolation, concealment of whereabouts, psychological pressure and preparation for subsequent judicial or administrative formalisation.

In one case, the chain began with detention at the place of residence in August 2021. The person was then taken to an MGB basement in Donetsk, where he remained from approximately August 2021 to August 2022. He was then moved to another basement or special place of detention that the witness associates with occupation structures of the so-called LNR or DPR, where he remained until March 2023. The next stage was correctional colony No. 19, then a pre-trial detention centre in Starobilsk for the case to be brought into line with Russian criminal law, return to the colony and subsequent transfer to Perm Krai, to the city of Solikamsk in the Russian Federation, to correctional colony No. 2, where he remained until an exchange in August 2025.

In the case of the city mayor, the route was shorter but politically illustrative. After the occupiers detained his father, the official himself arrived at the place

where he assumed his relative might be held. There he was detained, placed in an FSB vehicle, had a bag pulled over his head and was driven towards Berdiansk. He was then held in a cell at the Berdiansk police department's isolation facility, or at a place of detention associated with it, after which he was interrogated by the commandant and released. The key feature of this chain is not the number of stages, but the fact that the route began with the effective hostage-taking of the father and ended with coercion to cooperate.

In the case of the feldsher from Novopoltavka, in the temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, the route consisted of several local stages. After being detained near his house, he was held and beaten near a ravine, then taken to a cemetery, where psychological pressure was intensified by the presence of a pit and the atmosphere of a possible execution. He was then taken to Chernihivka, to premises he later identified as a likely military registration and enlistment office or administrative-military premises, where interrogations took place. After two or three days, he was transferred to the administration, where he was held in garages behind iron doors in inhuman conditions, and later taken home at night.

For a resident of the Melitopol district in the temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, three separate chains of transfer were recorded. The first began with a house search, beating, a bag being placed over his head and transfer to the 'aviation town' in Melitopol, connected with the territory of the airfield. There, he was held for approximately 15 days in a room with other civilians, systematically interrogated and tortured with electric shocks. The second episode involved detention, transfer to an open field and then to an unidentified garage facility, interrogations and beatings over approximately ten days. The third episode involved detention by occupation police officers, transfer to the FSB, detention for approximately five days in unknown premises, and release in Melitopol. A separate later route concerned departure from the temporarily occupied territories through Novoazovsk and one and a half months of filtration in Taganrog, Russian Federation.

In the case of the student from Donetsk, the route demonstrates the classic structure of the repressive system in the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast. After his detention in August 2020, he was taken to the MGB headquarters in Donetsk, where he was held for about four days. He was then transferred to Izoliatsiia, where he remained for about seven months and was subjected to torture. From March 2021 to June 2023, he was held at the MGB pre-trial detention centre, formerly Correctional Colony No. 97 in Makiivka. He was released only after the criminal case was closed; until then, he remained under a written undertaking not to leave and under the effective control of occupation structures.

In the case of the farmer and ATO veteran from Polohy district, all three detentions were linked mainly to Molochansk. The first time, he was taken from his home to the basement of an administrative building in Molochansk, where he was held for four days, interrogated and subjected to violence. The second time, he was again taken to the same or an associated basement,

where torture in the form of electric shocks, including to the genitals, was used to obtain information. The third episode involved his transfer to the Molochansk police department, further detention in premises connected with a factory or production area, interrogations, beatings and release after a short time.

In the case of the victim from Enerhodar, the route has the character of enforced disappearance followed by judicial formalisation. After his detention in April 2024, the family did not know his whereabouts for a prolonged period. It later became known that he had been held for approximately five months in a so-called 'pit' in Enerhodar, where torture was used. He was later transferred to the internal affairs department in Prymorsk, then to Donetsk pre-trial detention centre No. 1, after which a trial took place in Enerhodar, and he was transferred to Berdiansk correctional colony No. 77.

In another case, the chain included initial detention, transfer to Izoliatsiia, transfer to MGB and UBOP structures, temporary detention facilities, the Donetsk pre-trial detention centre, special posts, court procedures, a sentence by the so-called 'Supreme Court of the DPR' imposing the death penalty, and subsequent review of the case after the occupied territory was integrated into the Russian Federation. The case was then transferred to the Rostov District Military Court, which issued a new sentence of 16 years' imprisonment in a strict-regime colony. Later, the person was taken out of the cell, transported in stages by prison vans, moved to an airfield, then transferred across Belarus, and finally 'exchanged' and returned to Ukraine.

In the Tokmak case, the route was local: detention at home after a search, transfer to the police department or temporary detention facility in Tokmak, detention in two different cells, systematic interrogations, electric shocks, beatings and release after approximately two weeks. Despite its local nature, this case is important because of the detailed description of cells, night-time torture, forced singing of the Russian anthem, threats with dogs and references to the detention of other civilians.

In the case of the ATO veteran detained at a checkpoint while attempting to leave, the route was particularly complex. After the checkpoint, he was taken to a field or base near a settlement, beaten, had shots fired near his head, was forced to dig a pit, was wounded in the leg, and then held in the basement of unidentified premises. He was then transferred to the Melitopol airfield or related premises, then to Donetsk, Olenivka and further into the Russian Federation, including transit sites and torture in Russian places of detention. The route ended with an exchange in April 2022, but the physical consequences lasted much longer.

In the case of the woman from Melitopol, the route began with a search of her apartment and interrogation, after which she was taken to a complex of garages and utility premises near a former medical building in the New Melitopol area. She was first held in a garage, where there was an attempted poisoning with smoke, and later in a small, damp storeroom. After her release,

she remained in hiding in Melitopol for some time because her documents had been seized, and to leave the occupied territory, she had to use another person's passport.

In the Berdiansk case involving the wife of a serviceman, the route began at the commandant's office, where she had come for a pass. After being beaten and detained, she was taken with a bag over her head to an unknown place, which she could only approximately associate with one of the districts of Berdiansk or with places where the occupiers held people. Sexual violence and torture occurred there. She was later thrown out onto the street, after which she obtained help from neighbours and later left the city.

In the case of the man with a disability from Melitopol, only part of the route has been established. According to the testimony of a close person, he was detained at night in his own apartment. Later, information came in that he was being held in basements in Melitopol and then in Rostov-on-Don, likely in a pre-trial detention centre.

In the case of the driver from Polohy district, the route began with detention at home in autumn 2023. For a long time, the family did not know the exact place of detention. It later became known through a lawyer that he was being held in Mariupol pre-trial detention centre No. 2, then that he had been transferred to Simferopol for investigation, trial and sentencing, after which he was moved to Rostov-on-Don, to pre-trial detention centre No. 1. This route demonstrates the link between the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, occupied Mariupol, Crimea and Russian judicial and penitentiary infrastructure.

In the case of the woman from the Yakymivka district, the route had an inverse character. After characterising stages of checks, the seizure of her phone and equipment, and summonses to the occupation police and the migration service, she was issued expulsion documents. She and others were then taken to Melitopol, where documents were processed, fingerprints were taken, her phone was seized, and she was transported through the territory of the Russian Federation, including Rostov Oblast and the Vladikavkaz area, to the Verkhny Lars crossing point on the border with Georgia. Only after this was she able to return to Ukrainian government-controlled territory through third countries.

In the testimony of the prisoner of war, the chain includes capture during hostilities, detention in a basement in the area of Vodiane, Pokrovsk district, temporarily occupied Donetsk Oblast, a short medical examination, a camp in the occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast, transfer through Rostov in the Russian Federation, staged transfer to pre-trial detention centre No. 2 in Orsk, Russian Federation, and later return through Rostov and Homel, Belarus, as part of an exchange. The particular value of this route lies in the testimony about civilians held together with prisoners of war, which may indicate the mixing of legal categories of detainees and additional risks for civilians.

## **6. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION**

The conditions of detention described in the April testimonies systematically failed to meet the minimum requirements of humane treatment and bear indications of inhuman and degrading treatment. People were held in basements, garages, storerooms, cells in temporary detention facilities, pre-trial detention centres, colonies, barracks, filtration premises, administrative buildings and unofficial places of detention. Often the premises were not intended for holding people: they lacked toilets, showers, ventilation, proper lighting, heating, mattresses or access to clean water. In some cases, detainees had to sleep on the floor, on chairs, on wooden benches, in jackets, or while sitting up.

Detention in inhuman sanitary conditions was one of the most recurring violations. In basements and garages, a toilet was either absent or replaced by bottles, buckets or a designated corner. In some places, a person was taken to the toilet only with the guard's permission, sometimes with a bag over the head or in a humiliating position. In the Tokmak temporary detention facility, a witness described a blocked toilet, a lack of water, bottles and dirt on the floor. In the old MGB basement, according to one testimony, there was no access to a toilet at all during the first months. In the garages and basements of Molochansk, Chernihivka, and Melitopol, the lack of a toilet forced people to restrict their food and water intake so they would not need to relieve themselves.

Food was irregular, insufficient or provided in a humiliating manner. In some places, minimal portions of canned food, bread, porridge, biscuits or tea were given. In certain cases, people refused to eat because they had no access to a toilet. In Izoliatsiia and other long-term places of detention, witnesses described systematic undernourishment, heat, overcrowding and rules that prevented people from lying down or sleeping normally during the day. In the camp for prisoners of war and civilians described by the witness, the amount of food was small, and the detention regime combined restrictions, beatings, forced singing and propaganda practices.

Temperature conditions were also used as a form of inflicting physical and psychological suffering. In the Berdiansk isolation facility, the victim was held in a cell at a temperature of approximately five or six degrees Celsius and without heating. In the basements of Molochansk, it was cold, around 14 or 15 degrees Celsius, and detainees were lightly dressed. In the Melitopol garages and storerooms, it was damp and cold; people slept on the floor or huddled together to keep warm. In pre-trial detention centres and during transfers to the Russian Federation, witnesses described cold cells, poor ventilation, dampness and lack of proper medical care.

A separate form of inhuman treatment was forced body position, the prohibition of movement, or the prohibition of speech. In the 'aviation town' in Melitopol, detainees were laid on the bare floor and forbidden to stand up;

attempts to rise were punished with beatings. In some cells, people were forbidden to speak, look through cracks, raise their heads or communicate with other detainees. In Donetsk and Izoliatsiia, strict rules of conduct were described, including control through cameras, a ban on lying down during the day, and coercion to listen to or sing symbolic songs of the occupation structures. Such rules served not the safety of the captors, but the constant humiliation and breaking of the victims' will.

Medical assistance was either absent or punitive in nature. Victims with broken ribs, a leg wound, stomach bleeding, head injuries, damaged teeth, burns from electric shocks, heart problems or severe pain were not given proper care. In some cases, a 'doctor' merely confirmed the person's serious condition, after which the person was thrown out or released so that they would not die in the place of detention. In the testimony of the woman from Melitopol, the medical worker appears not as someone providing assistance, but as a participant in the torture system, giving injections and connecting people to electric current.

The psychological conditions were no less severe than the physical ones. Witnesses described uncertainty, not knowing whether they would be released, killed, sentenced or taken away. Constantly hearing the screams of other detainees, night-time beatings, threats of execution, demonstrative torture, mock executions, intimidation through family members and sexualised threats created an atmosphere of constant terror. In several testimonies, victims directly stated that after release, they suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disorders, panic attacks, memory problems, nervous-system problems, hallucinations or the need for antidepressants and rehabilitation.

## **7. COURT PROCEEDINGS AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL**

Quasi-judicial proceedings in the April body of testimony play a dual role. On the one hand, they are the final stage of some unlawful detentions, when prolonged incommunicado detention and torture are transformed into a formal case. On the other hand, they are used as a means to legitimise violence already committed and as a way to isolate a person for a long period under the guise of criminal punishment.

Typical violations of the right to a fair trial in the documented material include detention without prompt notification of the grounds; prolonged detention without access to a lawyer; obtaining confessions or information under torture; lack of effective family access to documents; dependence of appointed lawyers on the occupation system; use of a lawyer merely as a means of communication; refusal to appeal because of fear of worsening the person's situation; courts in occupied territories or in the Russian Federation; bringing occupation articles into line with Russian law without the person's genuine participation; and the imposition of clearly disproportionate types and terms of punishment.

### **The most common articles of accusation were:**

- 'terrorism' (article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation);
- 'financing terrorism' (article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation);
- 'espionage' (article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation);
- 'extremism' (article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation);
- 'high treason' (article 335 of the Criminal Code of the 'LNR').

At least six cases contain data about formalised criminal or quasi-criminal prosecution. In the Luhansk case, for approximately the first four months, the person was held without an article and without official formalisation, and later an article of the so-called Criminal Code of the LNR on 'high treason' was introduced. After the integration of the occupation system with the Russian system, this case was brought into line with the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The witness describes the private lawyer primarily as a channel of communication with the family, rather than as an effective mechanism of defence. No appeal was filed because it was believed that it could only worsen the situation and increase the sentence.

In the case of the student from Donetsk, the formalisation of persecution occurred after an initial period of administrative or informalised detention, which the witness himself links to the most severe torture. The case concerned accusations of 'espionage' or similar acts, but was eventually closed for lack of *corpus delicti*, and the person was released under a written undertaking not to leave. What is important here is that even the end of the case without a conviction does not erase the fact of years of unlawful detention and torture.

In the case of the young man from Enerhodar, the judicial stage came after several months of incommunicado detention and torture. The relative's testimony indicates a sentence under an article connected with explosives or an explosive device, a term of six years and a fine. The family did not receive proper access to documents, and the possibility of appeal was effectively restricted because of fear for the detainee's girlfriend, who could face additional pressure. This context points to the absence of genuine freedom to choose a legal strategy.

In another case, the judicial phase first included a sentence by an occupation structure, including the death penalty, and later a review in the Russian system with a lengthy prison term. This case demonstrates how occupation 'courts' may serve as the initial link, and Russian courts as the next stage, in the same persecution.

In the case of the man with a disability from Melitopol, at the time of documentation, there was information about the opening of a criminal case and possible preparation for a trial. The incomplete data do not allow a final conclusion about the stage of the proceedings. However, the existing path from disappearance to detention in the Russian Federation already indicates a high risk of case fabrication without proper defence guarantees.

In the case of the driver from Polohy district, the trial reportedly ended in life imprisonment. At the same time, the family did not have information about his whereabouts for a long time, the lawyer was not present at all stages, and documents and case materials remained available only to a limited extent. The route through Mariupol, Simferopol and Rostov itself indicates movement between different jurisdictional levels of the occupation and Russian systems.

The administrative expulsion of the woman from the Yakymivka district should be considered separately. Formally, this is not a classic criminal trial. However, in legal terms, it contains indications of a punitive administrative procedure carried out under the control of the occupation authorities without any real possibility of defence. The person was forced to sign documents whose content she could not properly verify, her phone was seized, fingerprints were taken, and she was transported through the territory of the Russian Federation to the border with Georgia. This shows that violations of the right to a fair procedure may occur not only through 'courts', but also through migration and administrative mechanisms of occupation control.

## **8. INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT**

One of the most important features of the April body of testimonies is the extensive information about other victims who are not the main persons in their respective testimonies. This information is not always sufficient for an independent case analysis, but it has significant analytical value because it confirms that the 16 documented cases are part of a broader practice rather than a set of random episodes.

In Prymorsk, a witness reported two cases of the killing of local residents at a checkpoint in the first days of the occupation, the detention of local men who were forced by representatives of occupation structures to dig trenches or perform other hard labour, and the use of civilians as 'human shields' when checking potentially mined buildings. He also reported another law enforcement officer who was detained with him and pressured to head an occupation structure. This indicates the systematic use of detention to control the community and coerce local elites into cooperation.

In Novopoltavka and Chernihivka, a witness described other men brought to a military registration and enlistment office or administration, held in offices and garages, interrogated and beaten. He directly stated that there were many people there, that people were constantly being brought in and taken away, and that screams could be heard day and night. This indicates the functioning of a local filtration or torture point, where individual detainees were subjected to short but violent cycles of checks.

In Melitopol, Tokmak, Molochansk and other settlements of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, testimonies contain numerous references to farmers, veterans, activists, members

of territorial defence, entrepreneurs, relatives of military personnel, people tortured with electric shocks, beaten, held in basements or transferred to Crimea or the Russian Federation. In the case of the woman from Melitopol district, a group of detainees in garages was described, including entrepreneurs, farmers, activists and family members of persons whom the occupiers considered connected with Ukrainian structures. In the same place, the witness saw and heard about the torture of men with electric shocks, threats to cut off genitals, beatings at night and a case in which a person's legs were broken after an attempted escape.

In Donetsk and Izoliatsiia, witnesses describe the detention of very different categories of persons: students, entrepreneurs, employees of occupation bodies, unemployed people, pensioners, foreigners and people without any obvious political role. This indicates the breadth of the repressive practice within the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast, where suspicion of disloyalty or the need for statistics could be sufficient for detention. The testimonies also confirm that Izoliatsiia and related structures functioned not only as places of detention, but also as sites of systematic torture.

In the Berdiansk case, information about another older woman is particularly important. According to the victim's testimony, this woman was subjected to sexual violence and torture in the same place. The witness also stated that she knew of other cases of sexual violence from open or informal contexts, although she could not confirm them in detail. This points to the need for separate, safe documentation of CRSV, since such cases often remain hidden because of trauma, stigma and fear.

The testimony of a close person of the man with a disability shows another type of broader context – the property and social context. In this case, the disappearance may have been linked to both pro-Ukrainian activity in the information space and interest in the victim's housing. The same testimony also describes other cases of people detained at checkpoints or in Melitopol, including because of the contents of a phone, business or a conflict over property.

The testimony about Polohy district, in the temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, contains data on several other residents detained for varying periods, including an official and individuals detained for statements or for coordination on social media. This is important for analysing local occupation policy: persecution concerned not only those suspected of military cooperation, but also those who held administrative roles or could coordinate the community.

The testimony of the prisoner of war about the camp and pre-trial detention centre names several civilians held together with military personnel. They included civilians from Donetsk, Melitopol, Kramatorsk, Berdiansk and Polohy district. The reasons for their detention varied from previous service in the armed forces, a pro-Ukrainian position, participation in rallies, and obstruction of the movement of occupation equipment to unspecified 'document checks'. This again demonstrates that civilians are sometimes held within a system formally intended for prisoners of war or mixed categories of detainees. This complicates searches by families and human rights structures and constitutes a separate violation of international humanitarian law.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Union's work in documenting Russian war crimes against civilians in Ukraine in April 2026 demonstrates a persistent, recurring and interconnected practice of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians and other persons under the control of the Russian Federation or structures controlled by it. Although each case has individual circumstances, the overall pattern is sufficiently clear: detention without due procedure; concealment of whereabouts and incommunicado detention; seizure of phones, documents and equipment; interrogations about links with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the SBU, the ATO, local resistance or volunteering; physical and psychological violence and torture; coercion to cooperate or self-incriminate; repeated movement between unofficial and formal places of detention and staged transfers; and, in some cases, subsequent judicial formalisation within the system of occupation structures or the Russian Federation.

The most representative geographical area in the April body of material is Zaporizhzhia Oblast, where 12 of the 16 main cases were recorded. It is here that the combination of the military, special services, police, and administrative and migration control is most clearly visible. Melitopol, Tokmak, Molochansk, Prymorsk, Enerhodar, Berdiansk, Yakymivka, Chernihivka and Polohy district form a single repressive infrastructure, in which basements, garages, airfields, police departments, commandant's offices, migration bodies and colonies perform different functions within a single chain.

By status at the time of initial detention, the victims were civilians performing ordinary professional or civic roles: a local self-government official, a feldsher, farmers, a gas utility worker, a student, an entrepreneur, a pensioner, the wife of a serviceman, a person with a disability, a driver and a woman engaged in volunteer or pro-Ukrainian activity. The body of material also includes the testimony of a prisoner of war, which is valuable not for the statistics of civilian detentions as such, but for recording camp conditions and the presence of civilians in a system where they were held alongside military personnel.

Torture and ill-treatment are not random excesses, but a typical feature of a significant proportion of the documented cases. At least 11 of the 16 cases contain direct indications of severe physical violence, and at least seven include the use of electric shocks. Electric torture, beatings, mock executions, coercion to dig a pit, threats against family members, sexualised threats, deprivation of sleep, cold and sanitation form a complex mechanism of coercion and intimidation.

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in the April body of material is represented by both direct and indirect data. The gravest case concerns sexual violence against a woman in Berdiansk. At the same time, sexualised torture of men, threats of rape, threats against children and testimony about violence against other women show the widespread presence of CRSV within the system of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians. In this body of material, sexualised violence appears as a tool of humiliation, punishment, extraction of

information and demonstration of the captors' complete power over the bodies of victims.

The materials indicate the systematic use of criminal prosecution of civilians as a tool of repression. Formal articles, lawyers, sentences and staged transfers appeared after periods of torture, incommunicado detention and absence of effective defence. Sentences involving long terms or life imprisonment demonstrate the use of criminal prosecution as a tool for the long-term isolation and punishment of civilians or persons whom the occupation system considers disloyal.

A separate conclusion concerns the role of families. Relatives not only searched for the disappeared, delivered food and contacted authorities, lawyers and international structures, but also themselves became targets of pressure, threats, detention or torture. This shows that unlawful deprivation of liberty has a collective effect: it traumatises not only the direct victim but also the family, the community and society as a whole.

The April body of documented testimonies again confirms the need for further systematic documentation of chains of transfer. It is precisely these chains – from the place of detention to a basement, pre-trial detention centre, colony, court, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Georgia or a place of exchange – that make it possible to reconstruct not only the fate of a specific person, but also the institutional architecture of crimes against civilians. Without such reconstruction, individual episodes may appear local, whereas taken together they point to an organised system of persecution.

The presence among the victims of persons with serious illnesses and disabilities indicates the complete disregard by occupational structures for humanitarian standards of treatment of vulnerable groups.

Overall, the totality of documented facts indicates the presence of signs of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances, unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, unlawful transfer of civilians, persecution on political and religious grounds, and systematic violation of the right to a fair trial.

Thus, the quantitative indicators identified and the geography of detainee transfers confirm that unlawful deprivation of personal liberty is carried out not as an isolated act but as a process involving a series of coordinated actions by different structures. The recurrence of routes, the similarity of detention conditions, and the multi-stage nature of transfers indicate the existence of an organised practice relevant to qualifying the respective acts as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Reconstructing chains of transfer makes it possible not only to establish the individual circumstances of specific cases, but also to identify systemic patterns that may be used for further criminal investigations, advocacy and international legal response.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the results of the analysis of testimonies from witnesses and persons unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty as a result of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as the recurring patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law identified, the following measures are advisable:

### **1. To law enforcement agencies**

- a) Ensure continuous, systematic documentation of facts of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, including the circumstances of detention, places and conditions of detention, chains of transfer of detained persons, the use of torture and ill-treatment, and related judicial or pseudo-judicial proceedings. Such documentation should be carried out with due regard to standards for the admissibility of evidence in national and international criminal proceedings.
- b) Integrate the collected testimonies into the work of Ukraine's pre-trial investigation bodies and use them to qualify the relevant acts as war crimes and, where the necessary elements are present, crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances, unlawful imprisonment, torture and persecution of civilians.
- c) Regularly analyse victims' testimonies as a tool for identifying new trends, updating the typology of violations and assessing the evolution of practices of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty in the context of a prolonged armed conflict.
- d) Treat staged transfer and forced movement of civilians, including deportation to the territory of the Russian Federation, as separate episodes of international crimes in order to ensure proper criminal-law assessment and increase the effectiveness of investigations. Such acts should be documented separately from the initial unlawful detention and should include establishing the roles of escorts, administrations of places of detention and so-called 'judicial' bodies in the temporarily occupied territories. The relevant facts should form the basis for opening separate criminal proceedings under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, taking into account the cumulative nature of violations of international humanitarian law.
- e) Pay particular attention to conducting forensic medical and forensic psychiatric examinations in accordance with the UN Istanbul Protocol. This includes, in particular, recording the consequences of torture and ill-treatment, including injuries from electric shocks and systematic beatings, as well as psychological disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

- f) Establish a centralised database of such expert conclusions, which would help ensure the consistency of the evidentiary base, prevent re-traumatisation of victims and contribute to identifying typical patterns of violence.
- g) Include in the evidence strategy an element of systematic collection and recording of documentary confirmations related to the registration of detained persons. This includes correspondence and confirmations from the International Committee of the Red Cross, data on registration in places of detention, information on 'delivery' and individual identifiers of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation, as well as extracts from so-called 'personal accounts' or electronic record systems. The practice of 'appointed' lawyers or lawyers controlled by the occupation authorities refusing to provide case materials to families or victims' representatives should be recorded separately as an element obstructing the right to defence and access to information.
- h) Develop a separate procedural approach to qualifying the activities of so-called 'courts' in the temporarily occupied territories. The unlawful detention of civilians, the issuing of unlawful sentences and subsequent transfer beyond the occupied territory to the Russian Federation should be documented as separate, complex crimes encompassing unlawful deprivation of liberty, deprivation of the right to a fair trial and deportation of civilians.

## **2. To executive authorities**

- a) Ensure proper recognition of the status of persons who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty, including access to social, legal and psychological protection. Procedures for such recognition should be person-centred, should not place an excessive burden of proof on victims and should take into account the specific nature of crimes committed under occupation.
- b) Strengthen international cooperation to exchange information about places where civilian hostages are held, the conditions of their detention and the persons responsible, and use the collected materials in international mechanisms, including the ICC, universal jurisdiction and sanctions regimes.
- c) Develop specialised treatment and rehabilitation programmes for persons released from places of unlawful detention. Such programmes should cover the treatment of chronic illnesses and complications, including cardiovascular and kidney conditions, the consequences of prolonged starvation (anorexia, critical weight loss), and dental complications.
- d) Ensure long-term psychosocial support for families of persons held incommunicado or considered missing.

- e) Strengthen technical cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to verify transfer routes and the current status of detained persons.

### **3. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine**

- a) Advocate for ICRC access to specific pre-trial detention centres and colonies in the territory of the Russian Federation where, according to documented testimonies, civilians unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty are being held. These include, among others, facilities in Krasnodar, Volgograd, Kazan, Irkutsk, the Republic of Buryatia, Saratov Oblast and the Republic of Mordovia.
- b) Systematically use the documented routes of deportation and detention of civilians in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic formats to advocate for their release.

### **4. To international institutions and human rights organisations**

- a) Use the documented transfer routes, conditions of detention, qualifications under articles of Russian criminal law and described practices of treatment of detained persons to prepare targeted submissions to the International Criminal Court and UN Special Procedures on torture and enforced disappearances.
- b) Use the documented transfer routes, conditions of detention, qualifications under articles of Russian criminal law and described practices of treatment of detained persons to initiate individual and sectoral sanctions regimes against the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation and its related 'judicial' and administrative branches.

## **ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AND CUMULATIVE INDICATORS**

Since 2022, documenters of the NGO 'Union of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners' have identified and interviewed more than 683 persons – witnesses and victims of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and other international crimes against civilians. Of these, 16 persons were identified and documented during documentation work in April 2026. At the same time, the total number of persons identified by the Union through documentation, OSINT, and cooperation with human rights actors exceeds 1,000 who are unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty. The documented violations primarily include unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, as well as attacks on civilian infrastructure, appropriation of private property by occupation forces and other related crimes.

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