

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

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

**MARCH 2026**

# CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b>	2
<b>METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES</b>	3
<b>1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE BODY OF TESTIMONIES</b>	4
<b>2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTION</b>	4
<b>3. PROFILE OF THE VICTIMS</b>	6
<b>4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND LEGAL QUALIFICATION OF CRIMES</b>	7
<b>5. CHAINS OF TRANSFER</b>	10
<b>6. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION</b>	12
<b>7. COURT PROCEEDINGS AND VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL</b>	14
<b>8. INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT</b>	15
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	17
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	19
<b>ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AND CUMULATIVE INDICATORS</b>	22

## **SUMMARY**

The analytical review for March 2026 was prepared on the basis of an analysis of 16 testimonies from witnesses, victims and relatives concerning at least 16 civilians unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty by representatives of the Russian Federation and the occupation administrations under its control. The documented cases cover incidents that occurred in 2018 (1), 2019 (1), 2022 (13) and 2023 (1). They concern events in the temporarily occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia (10), Kherson (4) and Donetsk (1) oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (1), followed by detention in unofficial places of detention, temporary detention facilities, pre-trial detention centres and penitentiary institutions both in the occupied territories and in the Russian Federation. In all documented cases (16), indications of enforced disappearance were identified.

All documented cases contain indications of enforced disappearance, and most victims were subjected to arbitrary detention without any procedural formalisation. Some victims were later unlawfully transferred to the territory of the Russian Federation or temporarily occupied Crimea, where they faced criminal prosecution under articles on 'terrorism', 'espionage' or 'extremism'. In at least five (5) cases, civilians were convicted by courts of the Russian Federation or occupation judicial structures following closed or non-transparent proceedings accompanied by serious violations of the right to a fair trial.

The overwhelming majority of victims were civilian men. However, cases of persecution of women, including women representing religious communities, were also documented. The testimonies contain information about the persecution of members of religious communities, including Evangelical Christians of the United Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (UCCEF) and Muslims, with indications of persecution in the broader context of the Russian Federation's systematic pressure on religious communities in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

In at least four cases, torture and other forms of ill-treatment were documented, including beatings, electric shocks, death threats and psychological violence. In two cases, indications of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) were recorded, including sexualised humiliation, threats of sexual violence and forced nudity.

Several testimonies point to the particular vulnerability of victims. At least four victims had serious illnesses or disabilities, but this was not taken into account during detention, transportation or court proceedings. In one case, an appellate court of the Russian Federation upheld the sentence of a person with a disability despite relevant arguments submitted by the defence.

Overall, the documented cases indicate the systematic and coordinated use by the Russian Federation of enforced disappearance, unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, unlawful transfer of civilians and criminal prosecution as

tools to suppress resistance, intimidate the population and establish control over occupied territories. The facts identified bear indications of war crimes and, where the contextual elements of widespread and systematic conduct are present, crimes against humanity within the meaning of international criminal law.

## **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 March 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.

The testimonies were collected in accordance with the principles of informed consent, respondent safety and anonymisation of personal data. In ten (10) cases, testimony was provided directly by persons released from unlawful detention; in six (6) cases, by their close relatives or witnesses. The analysis was conducted with regard to 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 2018 (1), 2019 (1), 2022 (13) and 2023 (1). In some cases, witnesses and victims also reported other civilians who were detained with them or abducted in similar circumstances. This makes it possible to trace a much broader scale of the practice of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty than the number of directly documented episodes. In addition, in a significant number of testimonies, women appear as relatives of victims – wives, sisters and mothers – who themselves faced persecution, threats or pressure from occupation structures.

All documented cases share the common feature of a complete absence of legal grounds for detention, and of the occupation authorities' refusal to provide any information about the legal status and whereabouts of the persons concerned.

In most cases, detention was accompanied at the initial stage by total isolation from the outside world. Relatives systematically received refusals from occupation 'law enforcement' bodies to confirm the fact of detention, creating a state of prolonged uncertainty and psychological pressure.

All documented cases bear indications of serious violations of international humanitarian law, international criminal law and international human rights law, including the prohibitions of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance, and violations of the right to a fair trial.

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

Найбільша кількість задокументованих затримань припадає на тимчасово окуповані території Запорізької області. Затримання відбувалися у Токмаку, Василівці, Бердянську, Пологах, Новогорівці, Кінських Роздорах, Молочанську та інших населених пунктах. Значна кількість випадків також зафіксована у Херсонській області – Генічеську, Херсоні, Скадовську, а також один – у Донецькій області. Окремо задокументовано випадок незаконного позбавлення особистої свободи цивільної особи у тимчасово окупованому Криму. Всього задокументованих випадків свавільного затримання та позбавлення особистої свободи на території:

### **Temporarily occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia Oblast (10):**

- Berdiansk district (1);
- Vasylivka district (1);
- Melitopol district (1);
- Polohy district (7).

### **Temporarily occupied territories of Kherson Oblast (4):**

- Henichesk district (1);
- Skadovsk district (1);

- Kherson district (1);
- within Kherson Oblast (1).

**Temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk Oblast (1):**

- Donetsk district (1).

**Temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (1):**

- Yalta district (1).

In most cases, detentions were carried out by armed representatives of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Rosgvardiya, the FSB or formations under their control. In a significant number of cases, the perpetrators wore balaclavas or civilian clothing, did not identify themselves and did not state the legal grounds for detention. Typical places of detention included:

- private houses and flats;
- checkpoints;
- streets of settlements;
- workplaces;
- administrative buildings;
- premises of municipal enterprises;
- locations of pro-Ukrainian rallies.

The testimonies show a wide range of pretexts and motives for detentions, or explanations for such detentions given by occupation structures, primarily any manifestation perceived as 'disloyalty'. These included:

- participation in pro-Ukrainian rallies;
- alleged transmission of information about the movement of Russian troops;
- volunteer activities;
- contacts with Ukrainian servicemembers;
- previous service in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) or in law enforcement agencies;
- a pro-Ukrainian position;
- religious affiliation (Evangelical Christians, Muslims) or ethnic affiliation (Crimean Tatars);
- possession of Ukrainian symbols or relevant messages on a phone;
- refusal to cooperate with the occupation authorities.

In several cases, the persecution was directly linked to family ties of the victims. Occupation structures asked about the children of one detainee who was serving in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), as well as about relatives of persons whom the occupiers considered disloyal.

In several cases, the actual reason for persecution and detention was random or everyday circumstances. One victim was detained after taking photographs near an administrative building in Vasylivka; another person was detained because of a message found on a phone concerning participation in a pro-Ukrainian rally.

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

Among the 16 documented victims, men predominated – 13 persons – while women accounted for three (3) cases. Despite the numerical predominance of men among the victims, women’s testimonies contain specific aspects of violations, including threats of sexual violence, sexualised humiliation and psychological pressure directed both at the victims themselves and at members of their families.

As regards the status of the victims at the time this review was prepared, ten (10) persons had been released from unlawful detention. In four (4) cases, the violations remain ongoing, meaning that the persons continue to be held unlawfully, three of whom are serving sentences after conviction. For one (1) person, information on their current status remained unknown; one (1) person was killed by representatives of the occupation forces.

An analysis of the victims’ actual places of residence shows the highest concentration of cases in the temporarily occupied territories of southern Ukraine. Ten (10) victims lived in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, three (3) in Kherson Oblast, one (1) in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, one (1) in Donetsk Oblast and one (1) in Kharkiv Oblast.

The victims’ professional and social profiles show that persecution affects a wide range of civilians and is not limited to persons who took part in resistance or public activities. The largest category consisted of persons whose activities had no potential connection to their abduction or imprisonment – four (4) cases. Three (3) victims were representatives of state authorities and local self-government bodies. Two (2) cases concerned volunteers, and another two (2) concerned farmers. For two (2) persons, the activity type remained unknown. In addition, the victims included one (1) veteran, one (1) person involved in political and civic activity, one (1) critical infrastructure worker and one (1) person connected with education and culture. This profile indicates the systematic persecution of people who either had authority in local communities or could be perceived by the occupation authorities as potentially disloyal.

The ethnic and religious dimension of persecution requires separate attention. The testimony concerning a Crimean Muslim contains indications of persecution in the context of the Russian Federation’s systematic pressure on the Crimean Tatar and Muslim community following the occupation of Crimea. At the same time, a representative of the United Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith (UCCEF) reported systematic pressure by occupation structures in Berdiansk district, in the temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, aimed at forcing the religious community to register with a structure controlled by the occupation authorities. According to her, individual members of the religious community were subjected to searches, persecution and intimidation, indicating the use of religious control by the occupation administration as one of the tools for suppressing independent civic and spiritual centres.

The issue of victims’ vulnerability is of particular analytical interest. In seven (7)

cases, information on the presence or absence of vulnerability factors remained unknown. At the same time, in five (5) cases, witnesses directly stated that there were no specific vulnerability factors. At least four (4) victims had serious illnesses or injuries that significantly worsened their conditions of detention and increased the risk of severe health consequences. In two (2) cases, mental health disorders or serious psychological consequences of the violence and torture experienced were recorded, and one (1) person had a physical disability.

Some victims had a clearly expressed pro-Ukrainian position. At the same time, most victims had not engaged in any activity that could be interpreted as resistance, which points to the arbitrary and repressive nature of the detentions.

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

All documented cases contain indications of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty and arbitrary detention of civilians.

Analysis of the body of testimonies enables the identification of several main types of violations of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international human rights law. All 16 documented cases contain indications of enforced disappearance, as the detentions were carried out by representatives of occupation structures and followed by the concealment of information about the whereabouts, legal status or fate of the detained persons.

In nine (9) cases, the issue was unlawful deprivation of personal liberty without the formalisation of any charges or sentences. These cases were characterised by detention in basements, commandant's offices, seized administrative buildings or other unofficial places of detention, without access to a lawyer, contact with the outside world or any procedural status. In addition, in one (1) case, unlawful deprivation of personal liberty was recorded, followed by the formalisation of persecution through the opening of criminal proceedings by occupation structures or law enforcement bodies of the Russian Federation.

In another five (5) cases, prolonged unlawful imprisonment was recorded after so-called 'sentences' were handed down by courts of the Russian Federation – the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation (2), and an unidentified court in Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation – or by occupation structures, namely the so-called 'Supreme Court' of the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Simferopol and the 'Supreme Court of the DPR'. The testimonies show that these proceedings were accompanied by gross violations of the right to a fair trial, concealment of court proceedings, the use of torture, coercion into self-incrimination and the absence of an effective defence.

In at least one (1) case, incommunicado detention was documented, with a person

held for a prolonged period in complete isolation, without access to relatives, lawyers or international organisations.

In at least six (6) cases, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment were documented. At the same time, the actual number of cases of violence may be significantly higher, as some witnesses reported beatings, threats and psychological pressure without giving detailed descriptions or directly qualifying their experience as torture.

In two (2) cases, indications of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) were recorded, including threats of sexual violence, sexualised humiliation and forced undressing. In one testimony, the victim described repeated intimidation with gang rape, during which she was told that 'eight people with condoms are already waiting'. In another case, the wife of a detainee reported an attempt by Russian soldiers to coerce her into sexual acts while she was searching for information about her husband. Such acts were used as a tool of psychological pressure, intimidation and humiliation of human dignity.

In at least four (4) cases, the use of electric shocks during interrogations was recorded. Victims were connected to TA-57 field telephones, generators or other electrical devices. Electric current was applied to the hands, feet, torso and other parts of the body. Numerous testimonies mention beatings with plastic batons, feet, fists and rifle butts. Victims were forced to stand in stress positions and were kept blindfolded or with bags over their heads. In particular, witnesses and victims of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty stated:

- "Three structures interrogated me at the same time, applying physical pressure and torture. The hardest part was when they took me into the shower room onto a wooden KNT-1 platform, beat me with plastic batons, turned me over and beat me again. It was extremely severe physical and psychological pressure.

They gave me electric shocks through a TA-57, a telephone device that generates electric current. I fell. I do not know exactly how many volts it was, but the current hits you, and even a small shock is very noticeable. My memory and hearing are still somewhat impaired because of it. I no longer remember the exact dates. Beria shocked me with electricity.."

- "I was sitting on a chair. The occupiers were to my right. Then one of them took out a box-like device with wires and told me to undress. They then attached the wires: one to my big toe and another to my thumb. After that, they began sending electric current through my body. I felt severe pain; I was thrown to the floor, falling sometimes on my stomach, sometimes on my back, sometimes on my side. But they lifted me up, sat me back in the chair, and then continued. The current varied in strength. Sometimes it was weaker, sometimes very strong, especially when they suddenly increased the voltage. They poured water over me – on my face, hands and legs – to intensify the effect of the current. As a result, I was left with burns."

- “They forced other detainees and me from the cell to put our hands through the food hatch. They tied wires to our fingers and passed electric current through them (a “tapik”). This lasted several minutes at a time, with varying intensity. They asked why I was being held, but in fact, they shocked me for no reason, “for fun”. These actions were repeated almost every night for about eight days.
- “They took me to a separate office. There, I felt wires being wrapped around my fingers. The interrogation was conducted with a bag over my head, which was also wrapped with tape, making it hard to breathe. During the interrogation, they beat me with a rubber baton on my body and with a plastic bottle on my shoulders and kidneys. They poured water over me so that the electric current would conduct better. During the interrogation with the use of physical force, there were about three people in the room. One directly used physical force; another had a calm, well-trained voice and asked questions, probably acting as the investigator; the third voice could be heard from a distance.”

The testimonies also repeatedly mention threats against family members, psychological pressure through children or spouses, and the use of other detainees as a tool of coercion.

Thus, in the vast majority of cases, detention was accompanied by additional serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The most common forms of violations were:

- enforced disappearances;
- torture;
- cruel and inhuman treatment;
- death threats;
- psychological pressure;
- sexualised violence and threats of sexual violence;
- incommunicado detention;
- coercion to cooperate;
- unlawful searches;
- seizure of documents;
- fabrication of criminal cases;
- unlawful transfer of civilians to the territory of the Russian Federation.

By their nature and scale, the documented acts may be qualified as:

- the war crime of unlawful confinement;
- the war crime of torture;
- the war crime of cruel treatment;
- the war crime of unlawful deportation or transfer.

Given the presence of indications of systematic and widespread conduct, these acts may also be qualified as crimes against humanity:

- the crime against humanity of torture;
- the crime against humanity of enforced disappearance;
- the crime against humanity of persecution on political, ethnic or religious grounds.

## **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 beyond Ukraine's state border to the territory of the Russian Federation.

In seven (7) cases, no transfer or further movement of victims after detention was recorded, or the relevant information was unavailable. At the same time, in at least five (5) cases, the transfer of civilians to the territory of the Russian Federation was documented, bearing indications of unlawful transfer or deportation of civilians.

Several testimonies show complex, multi-stage chains of transportation through numerous places of detention, pre-trial detention centres, penal colonies and transit points. One of the longest documented chains of transfer concerned a person detained at an airport in the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea. After three days of detention without access to a lawyer and with the use of violence, the person was placed in a pre-trial detention centre in Krasnodar, Russian Federation, and was later transferred to Rostov-on-Don for trial before a military court. After sentencing, the victim was transferred to the strict-regime correctional colony No. 3 in Skopin, Ryazan Oblast, Russian Federation, where he remained detained at the time he gave testimony.

Another well-documented case concerns a person detained in Donetsk, in the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk Oblast. After detention, the person was taken to the building of the so-called 'MGB of the DPR', where interrogations involving violence were conducted. The person was then transferred to the unofficial detention site 'Izolyatsia', where they were held for approximately 100 days, and then to a temporary detention facility and the Donetsk pre-trial detention centre. The victim was later transferred to Makiivka Correctional Colony No. 32, where they were held until August 2025. After that, the person was taken in a prison van to Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation, and then transported by plane across the territory of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus to the exchange location, where they were handed over to the Ukrainian side.

In another case, after an abduction in Kherson in July 2022, the victim was held in the basement of the Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and, in October 2022, was taken to Simferopol, in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea. In November 2022, the person was transferred to Lefortovo pre-trial detention centre in Moscow, Russian Federation, and later to Rostov-on-Don,

Russian Federation. As of the time the testimony was given, the victim continued to be held in pre-trial detention centre No. 5 in Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation.

A similar chain of transfer was recorded in relation to a person abducted in April 2022 in the village of Shevchenko, Kherson Oblast. At first, the victim was held in a hospital in Kherson and later in a torture site in Kherson. The person was then taken to temporarily occupied Crimea and, in autumn 2022, to Rostov Oblast in the Russian Federation, where a sentence was handed down in January 2023, and detention continued.

Another case shows the multi-stage transfer of a person detained in Kherson in March 2022. After initial detention, the victim was taken to pre-trial detention centre No. 1 in Simferopol, where he was held for a long period without procedural formalisation in the basement of the facility. He was later notified of suspicion of 'espionage' and then transferred to pre-trial detention centre No. 2 in Simferopol. After a sentence was handed down in 2023 and entered into force in 2024, the victim was transferred through Krasnodar, Volgograd, Ulyanovsk and Saratov to correctional colony No. 4 in Pugachov, Russian Federation.

In at least four (4) cases, transfers within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine were also recorded. Such transfers were usually accompanied by repeated interrogations, physical and psychological violence, and attempts to conceal the place of detention.

One such case concerns a person whom Russian soldiers forcibly took, after searching his house, to the police station in the urban-type settlement of Vesele. After interrogations involving violence, the victim was returned home. Later, however, the person was seized again and transported through the village of Fedorivka to Melitopol, where he was held in a private house for three days.

In another documented case, the detainee was taken to a furniture factory in Molochansk, where he was held in a garage and interrogated with the use of violence. After several days, the person was transferred to Tokmak, where he was held at a police station and regularly subjected to torture and interrogations using an electric shock device.

In two (2) cases, information about further movement or transfer remained unknown.

A general analysis of the documented routes allows identification of several typical patterns of civilian transfer. Most often, the initial detention took place in the territory of Zaporizhzhia or Kherson oblasts, followed by transportation to local places of detention – police stations, commandant's offices, basements or torture sites in Tokmak, Melitopol, Kherson, Molochansk or Vesele. Some victims were then transported to temporarily occupied Crimea, in particular to Simferopol, including pre-trial detention centres No. 1 and No. 2, and from there to pre-trial detention centres and judicial bodies in the Russian Federation, mainly in Moscow, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar, Volgograd, Saratov and other cities.

In a number of cases, the final stage was placement in correctional colonies in Ryazan Oblast, Saratov Oblast or other regions of the Russian Federation. Some chains also included movement through the territory of the Republic of Belarus as part of procedures for the exchange or handover of released persons to the Ukrainian side.

Overall, the documented chains of transfer indicate the systematic use of multi-stage transportation to isolate, disorient, and conceal civilians' whereabouts. Frequent movement between different places of detention also made it more difficult for relatives and international organisations to search for victims and, in some cases, created conditions for further torture and psychological pressure.

## **6. CONDITIONS OF DETENTION**

The conditions of detention described in the documented cases bear indications of inhuman and degrading treatment. Victims are held in overcrowded or unsuitable premises without access to adequate sanitation, medical care or sufficient food. Typical features of places of detention included:

- basements without toilets or water;
- cells with mould and damp;
- lack of ventilation;
- constant isolation;
- insufficient food;
- limited access to water;
- lack of medical care;
- overcrowded places of detention.

In a number of cases, victims reported a significant deterioration in health as a result of detention conditions and torture. The following were recorded:

- deterioration following beatings;
- neurological symptoms;
- impaired hearing and memory problems;
- exacerbation of chronic illnesses;
- severe psychological consequences;
- inability to receive necessary treatment.

The situation of persons with disabilities, serious illnesses, or injuries deserves particular attention. One victim had undergone partial amputation of the foot and needed a prosthesis, which was damaged during detention and became unusable.

The testimonies also contain numerous accounts of constant screams from other detainees, sounds of beatings, torture and CRSV, which were used as a tool of psychological pressure. In particular, those documented directly stated:

- “As for the conditions of detention, I can describe them as follows. The cell was for two people, approximately 2 to 2.5 metres. There was a toilet in the corner, and the water was irregular. There were two metal bunks and a table in the middle. The table had three holes; wires were pushed through them. These wires were used to tie the hands to the table, connect them to a generator, and deliver a shock to the body. Some people lost consciousness as a result. I have 20 years of experience as an electrician, so I tried to bring my hands together so that the electric shocks would go through my hands rather than through my whole body.”
- “The conditions of detention were extremely unsatisfactory. The premises were constantly damp, and there was pronounced unsanitary contamination: the cells had cockroaches, bedbugs and, periodically, rats. Because of this, we had to block the hole in the toilet with a plastic bottle filled with water to prevent rats from entering through the sewer. Food was provided three times a day, but its quality was very poor. There were no proper conditions for storing or preparing food.

At the initial stage, there were no means of boiling water in the cell – no electric kettle and no immersion heater. Because of this, we made a homemade device resembling an electric immersion heater ourselves so that we could obtain boiling water.”

- “Every day we were taken for a walk once a day, for approximately one hour. The walks took place on the roof of the pre-trial detention centre, where small exercise yards had been arranged. These yards were completely covered overhead with metal mesh, which restricted access to the open space, though it was at least possible to get some fresh air there.

We were taken to the shower once a week. At the same time, there was a long period, roughly in the winter of 2019–2020, when there was no hot water supply, and washing took place only in cold water.”

- “During the period of detention, we heard screams on the second floor, furniture being moved, and people being raped. I also saw attempts of sexual violence against civilians – it was very frightening.”
- “During detention, we were constantly subjected to physical and psychological violence, especially at night. During the day, there was sometimes an opportunity to rest a little, but at night, it was impossible to sleep because of the screams of people being tortured. They called us “serious ones”, which probably referred to the severity of the charges.”

Taken together, the described conditions of detention make it possible to qualify the documented practices as violations of the UN Convention against Torture and, in the context of an international armed conflict, as serious violations of international humanitarian law, including the prohibitions of torture, cruel treatment and unlawful deprivation of liberty of civilians. The recurrence of these practices across different testimonies indicates not individual abuses, but the systematic nature of such conditions of detention.

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

In some cases, unlawful deprivation of personal liberty ended with the opening of criminal proceedings under the legislation of the Russian Federation.

In five (5) cases, prolonged unlawful imprisonment was recorded after so-called 'sentences' were handed down by courts of the Russian Federation or occupation judicial structures. These included proceedings in the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation (2), an unidentified court in Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation, the so-called 'Supreme Court' of the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea in Simferopol and the so-called 'Supreme Court of the DPR'. The testimonies show that these proceedings were accompanied by gross violations of the right to a fair trial, concealment of court hearings, the use of torture, coercion into self-incrimination and the absence of an effective defence.

The most common charges 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);
- 'organising a terrorist group' (Article 205.4 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation);
- 'an act of international terrorism' (Article 361 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).

The testimonies contain numerous indications of gross violations of the right to a fair trial, including:

- lack of access to a lawyer;
- obtaining 'confessions' under torture;
- closed court hearings;
- psychological pressure;
- forced use of state-appointed lawyers;
- lack of effective appeal;
- concealment of evidence of torture.

In one documented case, the appeal hearing in the so-called 'Supreme Court of the DPR' was presided over by Liudmyla Zinovina-Stratiichuk. The testimony indicates that the process was non-transparent and that information about other members of the judicial panel was unavailable.

In another case, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced a civilian to 18 years' imprisonment. The proceedings were accompanied by prolonged

detention in a pre-trial detention centre. In another case, a court of the Russian Federation sentenced a civilian to 18 years' imprisonment in a strict-regime colony, with the first five years to be served in prison, under Articles 205.4 ('organising a terrorist group') and 361 ('an act of international terrorism') of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, in one case, the so-called 'Supreme Court' of the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Simferopol sentenced a civilian to 16 years' imprisonment under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('espionage'). The case was heard in closed session under the pretext of state secrecy. The appeal submitted by the defence, which referred to the victim's disability, was dismissed, and the sentence entered into force.

In another case, a civilian was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('espionage'). The trial was held in closed session without proper access to independent defence counsel. In other cases, victims were held for long periods without official status, while relatives could not obtain confirmation of the fact of detention.

Overall, the pseudo-judicial hearings were closed; relatives' access was restricted or completely prohibited; the defence was carried out by formally appointed lawyers; and the sentences were based on fabricated accusations or 'confessions' likely obtained under pressure or as a result of torture. The sentences imposed ranged from 11 to 18 years' imprisonment in general-regime and strict-regime colonies.

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

The vast majority of witnesses reported other civilians who were detained together with them or about whom they knew facts of torture, CRSV or serious bodily injury. This points to the mass and systematic nature of the practice of unlawful deprivation of liberty, extending beyond isolated cases and bearing indications of a coordinated policy of persecuting civilians. In particular, reports concerned:

- men who were severely beaten during interrogations;
- civilians held in basements;
- people bearing signs of severe beatings;
- cases of sexualised violence;
- the possible detention of minors;
- the use of planted informants or provocateurs in cells;
- coercion to cooperate with occupation structures.

Several testimonies contain information about civilians being held together with former military personnel, former law enforcement officers or persons suspected of resisting the occupation.

Overall, the broader context of the testimonies shows the use of unlawful deprivation of liberty as a tool to intimidate civilians, suppress pro-Ukrainian views, collect information, coerce cooperation and control occupied territories.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis of 16 testimonies concerning documented cases confirms the systematic and widespread nature of the practice of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty of civilians by representatives of the Russian Federation and the occupation structures under its control in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

All documented cases contain indications of enforced disappearance. Civilians were detained without proper procedural formalisation, with their whereabouts concealed, access to lawyers denied and contact with relatives restricted. This practice created conditions for the unpunished use of torture and other forms of violence.

The largest number of cases was recorded in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, indicating a high level of repressive control by the occupation authorities in these regions. The testimonies confirm the existence of a network of unlawful detention sites in Kherson, Melitopol, Tokmak, Molochansk, Vesele and other settlements.

The documented chains of transfer demonstrate the systematic use of civilian transfers to temporarily occupied Crimea and to the territory of the Russian Federation. Transfers through Simferopol, Rostov-on-Don, Moscow, Krasnodar, Saratov and other Russian cities were accompanied by the isolation of victims, obstruction of access by relatives and international organisations, and subsequent criminal prosecution.

In at least four cases, torture and other forms of ill-treatment were recorded, including electric shocks, beatings, mock executions, death threats and psychological pressure. At the same time, the actual scale of torture may be significantly broader because victims fear describing the violence they experienced in detail.

Two documented cases contain indications of conflict-related sexual violence, showing the use of sexualised violence as a tool of intimidation, humiliation and psychological influence on victims.

The materials indicate the systematic use of criminal prosecution of civilians as a tool of repression. In five cases, victims were convicted by courts of the Russian Federation or occupation judicial structures on charges of 'terrorism', 'espionage' or other state-security-related offences. The trials were characterised by closed hearings, the use of evidence obtained under pressure or torture, the absence of an effective defence and disregard for the victims' state of health.

The profile of the victims indicates that persecution affected a broad range of civilians, including representatives of local self-government bodies, education professionals, volunteers, farmers, veterans, members of religious communities

and people who had not engaged in any public activity. This confirms the arbitrary and repressive nature of the detentions. Cases of persecution of members of religious communities require particular attention. The testimonies show attempts by the occupation authorities to establish control over religious organisations, including through forced re-registration of religious communities and pressure on believers.

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

Overall, the totality of the documented facts indicates the presence of elements 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 violations of the right to a fair trial.

Thus, the identified quantitative indicators and the geography of detainees' 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 transportation indicate the existence of an organised practice relevant to the qualification of the acts concerned 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 can be used for further criminal investigations, advocacy and international legal response.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of 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 that were 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 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 667 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 March 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.

The documentation of war crimes and preparation of this analytical review were carried out by the Documentation Department and the Research and Analytics Department of the NGO 'Union of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners'.



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