ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NGO “ASSOCIATION OF RELATIVES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS OF THE KREMLIN”

IN DOCUMENTING RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS IN UKRAINE

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SUMMARY

This analytical review for June 2026 is based on an analysis of seventeen testimonies regarding unlawful deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, incommunicado detention, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment, unlawful displacement of civilians, politically motivated criminal prosecution, and violations of the right to a fair trial. The testimonies cover events from 2022 to 2026 in the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the subsequent detention of the victims in the Russian Federation.

Most of the primary victims—nine out of seventeen—were detained for the first time, or as part of the main documented incident, in 2022. Three individuals were detained in 2023, two in 2024, two in 2025, and two in 2026. At least three cases involve repeated detentions.

Geographically, the largest group consists of eight victims linked to the Zaporizhzhia region as their place of residence, persecution, or initial detention. These include Energodar, Melitopol, the villages of Tarasivka, Basan, Kostiantynivka, Novoprokopivka, the town of Chernihivka, and other settlements. Five victims are linked to the Kherson region: Kherson, Novooleksiivka, Kalanchak, Krynky, Oleshky, Hola Prystan, Henichesk, and Chongar. Two cases involve the Kharkiv region—the village of Groza in the Kupianskyi district and the town of Kutuzivka in the Kharkiv district. One case each is linked to Gostomel in the Kyiv region and the village of Malyi Mayak in occupied Crimea.

Among the seventeen primary victims, fourteen are men and three are women. Men account for 82.3% of the documented cases, while women account for 17.7%. This gender ratio is linked, in particular, to the persecution of men whom the occupying authorities perceived as potentially associated with territorial defense, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, former military or law enforcement service, the partisan movement, weapons, or the transmission of information. Three of the main victims are women: an emergency medical technician, a retiree from Energodar who was detained to extract information about her son, and a woman with a disability from occupied Crimea who was convicted for comments she made online.

As of the time of documentation, only three of the seventeen main victims had been released. Thirteen individuals, according to available data, remained in places of detention, penal colonies, or pretrial detention centers, or were considered de facto missing with unconfirmed whereabouts. One man, according to the testimony of a former cellmate, died in detention as a result of torture. In some cases, the family knows the specific facility or location, but in a significant number of cases, the information is limited to the region, a probable city, or information from released cellmates. In at least four current cases, the victim’s exact whereabouts are effectively unknown.

Signs of enforced disappearance, incommunicado detention, or prolonged concealment of whereabouts are evident in at least fourteen of the seventeen victims. In some cases, the family had no information for several days or weeks; in others, for months or more than a year.

At least eleven of the seventeen victims had their homes, property, or workplaces searched before, during, or after their detention. The searches were accompanied by the seizure of phones, computer equipment, documents, passports, photographs, records of phone numbers, weapons, or items that the occupying authorities attempted to present as evidence. In some cases, the searches were repeated weekly after release, were used to identify the circle of relatives and acquaintances, or were accompanied by the installation of wiretaps in the apartment.

Direct or sufficiently specific information regarding torture, severe physical violence, or bodily injuries resulting therefrom is available for at least ten of the seventeen victims. Methods included beatings with hands, feet, rifle butts, and other objects; electric shock torture; simulated executions, forcing victims to dig their own graves, the use of unloaded weapons to simulate suicide, covering the head with a bag or cloth, twisting fingers, death threats, sleep deprivation, deprivation of water and access to a toilet, denial of necessary medication, and psychological pressure through relatives. In one of the documented incidents, a man died after being tortured without ever regaining consciousness.

At least thirteen of the seventeen victims were held in two or more detention facilities, transit points, or during transit. At least nine people were taken from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. Among the recorded transit points were Luhansk, Melitopol, Mariupol, Donetsk, Simferopol, Dzhankoy, Chongar, Oleshky, Hola Prystan, Stary Oskol, Rostov-on-Don, Krasnodar Krai, and the Saratov, Vladimir, Leningrad, and Tula regions, as well as the Republic of Karelia. One civilian from Hostomel was transported via Belarus and then flown to the Russian Federation.

In at least eight cases, there is direct information about criminal proceedings, court hearings, or the consideration of cases by occupation or Russian courts. In five cases, a final or, as of the time of documentation, active guilty verdict is reported: 19 years in a strict-regime penal colony, 14 years in a strict-regime penal colony, 4 years and 3 months of imprisonment, 20 years of imprisonment after the initial 25-year sentence was reduced on appeal, and 5 years and 6 months of imprisonment. In one other case, court hearings are held almost monthly, but no final verdict has been handed down. In two other cases, there is information about court hearings or changes to the charges, but the final decision is unknown to the family.

The cases documented in June include specific examples, such as the repeated persecution of an elderly man in the Melitopol area, the case of an employee and union representative at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, the case of a civilian from Hostomel who was taken via Belarus to the Russian

Federation as a prisoner of war, or, for example, the persecution of a woman with a disability who lived in occupied Crimea.

From a legal perspective, the analyzed materials contain evidence of war crimes, including the unlawful deprivation of liberty of protected civilians, torture and inhuman treatment, unlawful transfer, intentional denial of the right to a fair and due trial, and, in one case, intentional homicide or causing death as a result of torture. Certain incidents in which relatives were detained or tortured to compel a third party to appear, provide information, or take specific actions require further investigation for possible indications of hostage-taking. If a broader pattern or state or organizational policy is established, these practices may also be analyzed in the context of crimes against humanity, including imprisonment, torture, enforced disappearances, persecution on political or national grounds, and murder.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This analytical review is based on a qualitative analysis of seventeen semi-structured testimonies collected by documenters from the NGO "Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners" in June 2026. Three of the testimonies were provided directly by individuals who survived unlawful detention and imprisonment. Fourteen testimonies were provided by relatives, family members, or close associates of the victims: children, mothers, sisters, brothers, a wife, and acquaintances.

The nature of the sources influences the nature of the available information. The victims themselves describe in detail the perpetrators, the facilities, interrogations, torture, cell conditions, detention conditions, and the circumstances of their release. Testimonies from relatives contain more details about the circumstances of the disappearance, search efforts, correspondence, lawyers, court proceedings, transfers between detention facilities, information from released cellmates, and the impact of prolonged detention on the family. At the same time, relatives often lack access to information about torture, detention conditions, and the exact location of detainees due to censorship of correspondence and the concealment of data by Russian or occupying authorities.

The primary unit of quantitative analysis is a single primary victim—seventeen testimonies pertain to seventeen primary victims. However, two testimonies pertain to a single shared episode involving the detention of two men in the village of Krynky (TOT, Kherson Oblast) and are used as complementary sources. In the statistics, these men are counted as two victims, but the episode itself is not counted twice. Thus, the June testimonies contain information about seventeen primary victims across sixteen separate incidents of detention or persecution. All mentions of other detainees, cellmates, family members, convicts, or deceased individuals are analyzed separately and are not included in the primary count of seventeen victims.

The analysis employed thematic coding in the following categories: date and place of detention; method of detention; actors involved in the detention; presence of a search and seizure of property; stated or probable motives; military or civilian status; previous professional activity; gender; age and health status; initial place of detention; chains of transfer; periods of incommunicado detention; torture and ill-treatment; possible signs of torture; conditions of detention; medical care; access to family; court proceedings; legal assistance; sentences; current status; information about other victims.

Open-source materials, procedural documents, court notices, video recordings, and letters were taken into account only to the extent that their content was reproduced or described in the testimonies provided. No independent verification of external sources was conducted within the scope of this review. Therefore, statements regarding places of detention, charges, sentences, or perpetrators reflect the respondents' knowledge at the time of the interview.

Testimonies were collected in accordance with the principles of informed consent, respondent safety, and the anonymization of personal data. The legal assessment was conducted in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international human rights law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention Against Torture. This includes, in particular, the prohibition of arbitrary and unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture, inhuman treatment, unlawful transfer of protected persons, taking of hostages, intentional killing, persecution, and denial of the right to a fair trial. The specific criminal classification of each incident requires establishing the status of the victim, the perpetrators, the connection of the act to the armed conflict, the form of intent, and other elements of the relevant criminal offense.

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BODY OF EVIDENCE

The cases documented in June 2026 are characterized by a predominance of prolonged unlawful detention. Only three victims were released, while fourteen remain in places of detention or have an unknown whereabouts, and one man, according to the information received, died as a result of torture. Unlike instances of short-term detention for interrogation, most cases have evolved into years of detention, transfer to Russia, criminal prosecution, or the complete concealment of a person’s fate.

In at least fourteen cases, there is a phase during which families do not know where their detained relatives are, have no official confirmation of the detention, or receive contradictory and incomplete information. The occupying authorities often denied the fact of detention, refused to accept statements, claimed that the person was not in their custody, or cited a lack of information. In the case of two men from Krynok, the official response stated that the FSB and other Russian agencies had not taken any action regarding them, even though their relatives had delivered personal belongings to the occupation police department, and a former cellmate described their subsequent torture.

A notable feature of this dataset is the use of Russian or occupation media as the primary source of information for families. In at least six cases, relatives received information through Russian television reports, Telegram channels, announcements from occupation courts, or publications about convictions. In three cases, detainees were portrayed in propaganda materials as “terrorists,” “traitors,” or individuals who had allegedly confessed to their guilt. In one video, a man, after a lengthy trial, confirmed that he agreed with the sentence handed down; however, the circumstances under which this statement was obtained cannot be established from the testimonies.

At least eleven of the main victims were subjected to searches or inspections of their homes. Most often, authorities searched for weapons, military uniforms, phones, correspondence with relatives in government-controlled territory, photographs, contact lists, documents, and items bearing Ukrainian symbols. In the case of a hospital employee, a work-related photograph of a list of employees and phone numbers was interpreted as information that could allegedly be used for sabotage. In the case of a woman from Crimea, authorities searched for flags, swastikas, and other items during the search; however, according to a relative, nothing was found. In the case of a pensioner from Energodar, a family photograph, a phone, a glucose meter, and a sheet of paper with phone numbers were seized; the photograph was subsequently used during interrogations regarding her family members.

Among the main motives for persecution are prior or alleged participation in territorial defense, former service in the Ukrainian military or law enforcement agencies, employment at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, refusal to

cooperate with the occupying authorities or to obtain a Russian passport, a pro-Ukrainian stance, contacts with relatives in government-controlled territory, Ukrainian identity, online statements, suspicions of possessing weapons, aiding partisans, or passing on information. In at least four cases, the victims were persecuted as a means of exerting pressure on their children, parents, or other relatives.

The motives and formal charges frequently changed. An employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant was initially linked to the manufacture of explosive devices, but the case was later reclassified as "treason." A man who had been detained multiple times in the Melitopol area was, during one of these incidents, allegedly prosecuted for violating curfew, even though he had not lived in the town where the alleged violation occurred for quite some time. Later, a photograph of a work log and correspondence with his son served as the basis for a 14-year sentence. Two men from Krynok were accused of allegedly feeding partisans in the floodplains, although official authorities subsequently denied that they had ever been detained.

2. GEOGRAPHY AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF DETENTIONS

The Zaporizhzhia cluster includes eight primary victims and demonstrates a combination of several patterns of persecution. In Energodar, ZNPP employees, union representatives, and family members of individuals whom the occupying authorities consider to be involved in the resistance remain a distinct at-risk group. One plant employee was detained after refusing to sign a contract with Rosatom and was charged with "treason." Another employee, who served as the head of the shop-floor union committee, was subjected to electric shock torture during his second detention over issues related to union activities, staff health insurance, his refusal to report to work, and his unwillingness to obtain a Russian passport.

In the case of a pensioner from Energodar, the detention was intended to put pressure on her family. Her younger son was suspected of having ties to a man who threw a bottle containing a flammable mixture at the occupying forces. After that, her apartment was systematically monitored, and the occupiers came twice to ask questions about her son. In June 2023, approximately eight armed individuals broke into the apartment; they covered the woman's head with a pillowcase and took her to the city police station. For seven days, they beat her, twisted her fingers, covered her head with a cloth, and demanded she reveal her son's whereabouts.

In the Polohivsky District (temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast), the persecution was linked to the search for members of the territorial defense forces and the use of family members to extract information. A man from the village of Tarasivka was detained following a tip-off about his father's involvement in the territorial defense forces. About twenty armed individuals, mostly wearing the insignia of the so-called "DPR," arrived at the house. The victim was brutally

beaten, taken to a school in neighboring Basan, and then to a converted private home, where he was tortured and subjected to a mock execution. During the same period, his mother was held for approximately two months in Melitopol.

In the Melitopol area, a pattern of repeated detentions and a gradual shift from informal violence to formalized criminal prosecution can be observed. A man born in 1965 was repeatedly taken from his workplace or home, held for months, released in a state of exhaustion, and then repeatedly summoned for interrogations and had his home searched. After his final arrest, he was transferred between Donetsk, Melitopol, and Simferopol and convicted of "treason."

Another man was detained in the middle of the street in Melitopol in April 2023. He was subsequently portrayed in Russian media as a "terrorist." He was held in a former police building, then transferred to Mariupol, and later to Rostov-on-Don. The indictment charges him with participating in a "terrorist group," manufacturing and possessing explosive devices, and committing a "terrorist act."

The Kherson bloc involves five victims and is characterized by large-scale arrest operations, so-called "filtration," the involvement of the FSB, transfers via Chongar and Crimea, and the use of unofficial detention sites. In the town of Novooleksiivka, between thirty and forty armed individuals, a large vehicle bearing a "Z" emblem, and a minibus arrived to detain a security guard. After searching him, they forced him to the floor, twisted his arms behind his back, and took him to the basement of a former vocational school in the city of Henichesk.

In Kherson, a former employee of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Border Guard Service—who had joined the territorial defense forces after the invasion began—was detained in his apartment the day after the arrest of the former mayor and another member of the territorial defense forces. Armed individuals in civilian clothing and balaclavas refused to identify themselves, did not present any documents, and stated that they "needed" the man and that he would help them find weapons.

In Kalanchak, a young farmer was detained by four representatives of the occupying forces, two of whom were wearing balaclavas. They confiscated his Ukrainian passport, which was never returned. According to a close relative, he spent nearly a year in Chongar before being transferred to a penal colony in the Saratov region.

The most severe incident in the Kherson sector was recorded in the village of Krynky. Approximately eight individuals in military and civilian clothing, without any identifying marks, simultaneously detained two brothers in neighboring houses. A relative saw one of them in handcuffs with a bag over his head; the other's hands were bound with plastic ties. After being searched, they were taken to Oleshky, and later to Hola Prystan and an unknown location near the sea.

The Kharkiv section covers two cases from the early period of the occupation. In the village of Groza, armed soldiers brought a man—who was registered with the

territorial defense forces and openly expressed pro-Ukrainian views—to his own home, searched it, found a military uniform, and took him away in an unknown direction. In Kutuzivka, according to local residents, Russian soldiers were specifically searching for a man with experience serving in the ATO. After his detention, he was taken to the village of Vesele and then transported to Stary Oskol.

The Gostomel case illustrates the practice of mass abductions of civilians during the occupation of the Kyiv region. According to the victim's brother, Russian soldiers were moving through the village and detaining civilians. The victim disappeared after leaving an acquaintance's house and was later taken via Belarus to Russia.

The Crimean case demonstrates the application of Russian criminal law to a resident of the occupied territory for publicly expressing a pro-Ukrainian stance. The basis for the prosecution was comments she posted on social media in 2023. After a search of her home, an interrogation at the FSB office, and a period under a travel ban, the woman was detained again and sentenced to 5 years and 6 months in prison under Part 2 of Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

3. PROFILE OF THE VICTIMS

Fourteen of the seventeen victims are men. Among them are critical infrastructure workers, security guards, drivers, farmers, an insurance company employee, a market worker, former military personnel, a retired law enforcement officer, individuals without formal employment, and men who were engaged in private side jobs. Two of the main victims worked at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. One was a foreman; the other was an instructor at a training center and a union representative.

At least five of the victims had a clearly established connection to prior military service, law enforcement, the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), or territorial defense. However, at the time of their arrest, not all of them had the status of active-duty military personnel or were directly participating in combat operations. One man had completed his service in the "Donbas" battalion in 2020. Another was registered with the territorial defense forces but was at home at the time of his arrest. Another was a former employee of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Border Guard Service who joined the territorial defense forces after the invasion. A market worker served in the ATO zone from 2016 to 2018. The man from Hostomel had prior military service experience but was working as a civilian security guard at the time of his arrest.

Several other victims had only completed mandatory or Soviet military service many years ago. Such experience in and of itself does not indicate participation in an armed conflict; however, under conditions of occupation, it could have been used as a formal or informal risk factor. One of the men convicted in Crimea, according to his sister, had never served in the military at all, despite being accused of "terrorism" and planning to blow up strategic facilities.

The profile of the victims confirms that repressive practices were not limited to targeting combatants. The group includes a healthcare worker, retirees, farmers, security guards, energy sector workers, individuals who cared for sick parents, and people who had no current connection to military service. Family ties, a pro-Ukrainian reputation, contacts with government-controlled territory, or a refusal to integrate into the occupation system often served as grounds for persecution.

Three of the victims are women. In two cases, pressure related to their children played a significant role. An ambulance worker may have been targeted, in particular, because of her sons, one of whom is a soldier, while the other had also been detained previously. A retiree from Energodar was detained and tortured in order to extract information about her son. In the third case, a woman with a disability was targeted for her public political statements.

At least eight of the victims had significant medical vulnerabilities prior to their detention. One man had heart problems, high blood pressure, spinal issues, and other chronic conditions. A ZNPP employee suffered a stroke and underwent surgery for a perforated ulcer. Another man had kidney disease, epilepsy, and extremely high blood pressure. A woman from Crimea had a disability and cataracts. A retired woman from Energodar had diabetes and required constant medication.

People who lived alone or whose close relatives were abroad were particularly vulnerable. In the case of the ZNPP employee, acquaintances were unable to get his disappearance reported for a long time because they were not his relatives. His sister lived in Israel, and his father was paralyzed. In the case of another Energodar resident, his daughter had not been in contact with him for many years; she was living abroad and was unable to establish contact with Russian lawyers. These circumstances significantly limited the ability to conduct a prompt search, provide legal assistance, and transmit information to Ukrainian authorities.

4. TYPOLOGY OF VIOLATIONS AND CLASSIFICATION OF CRIMES

The fundamental violation in all major cases is the deprivation of personal liberty without a transparent, lawful, and accessible procedure. Even in cases where Russian or occupying authorities subsequently opened criminal proceedings, held a trial, or handed down a sentence, the initial detention was mostly carried out without identifying the officers involved, without a written order, without informing the detainee of their rights, without recording the place of detention, and without access to a defense attorney.

In the context of an international armed conflict, the unlawful detention of protected civilians may constitute a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime. The formal initiation of criminal proceedings after a period of

incommunicado detention does not negate the unlawfulness of the initial detention, torture, unlawful transfer, or the absence of a fair trial.

Indications of enforced disappearance are present in cases where a person was deprived of liberty by representatives of the state or entities under its control, after which the fact of detention, the person's fate, or whereabouts were concealed or denied. These indicators are most pronounced in the cases of men from the village of Krynok, a civilian from the city of Hostomel, a man from the Kharkiv region, an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and several residents of Energodar and Melitopol. If the widespread or systematic nature of such practices is proven, they may be considered crimes against humanity.

Torture and cruel treatment constitute one of the central categories of testimony collected in June. Victims were subjected to electric shocks, blows to the head, torso, and ribs, beatings with feet and rifle butts, twisting of fingers, shooting at the limbs of other detainees, mock executions, death threats, and being forced to dig graves. The purpose of the violence was most often to extract information about relatives, weapons, checkpoints, territorial defense, union activities, or other residents, or to coerce confessions of guilt and cooperation.

The use of electric shocks was directly documented in at least three major cases: involving a man detained in Melitopol, an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and a former employee of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Border Guard Service. In the latter case, released cellmates reported problems with their legs following numerous interrogations and the use of electric shocks.

Simulated executions or suicides were documented in two cases. A man from the village of Tarasivka (Pologivsky District, temporarily occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast) had shots fired over his head, had a pistol held to him, and was taken out into the courtyard to simulate an execution. A security guard who had been detained multiple times was taken to a wooded area, forced to dig a hole, and made to pull the trigger of an unloaded pistol. Such actions cause extreme physical and mental suffering and constitute torture.

The death of one of the detainees in Krynky requires investigation as a possible intentional homicide, death resulting from torture, or another serious violation of international humanitarian law. An important potential witness is the man who was in the cell with the victims and handed the deceased's belongings over to his family. It is necessary to determine the exact location of the barracks, the identities of those who conducted the interrogations, the possible burial site or where the body was moved, as well as the fate of the second detainee.

A separate category involves the possible taking of hostages or the use of family members to coerce a third party. A man from Tarasivka was tortured and threatened with death, with demands that he reveal his father's whereabouts. A retired woman from Energodar was detained and beaten, with demands that she "turn in" her son. Regarding one of the co-detained Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power

Plant employees, it was reported that the occupiers took his mother and daughter to force him to surrender. To qualify as hostage-taking, it must be established whether the continued detention or threat was directly conditioned on a demand that a third party or authority perform or refrain from a specific action.

Unlawful transfer or deportation occurred in at least nine cases, in which civilians were taken from the occupied territory to the Russian Federation. People were transferred without their free and informed consent, under guard, following forcible detention, and without the possibility of returning. In the context of an international armed conflict, such actions may constitute the war crime of unlawful transfer or deportation of protected persons.

Another violation is the improper or deliberately incorrect determination of legal status. A civilian security guard from Hostomel is being held as a prisoner of war in Russia. A former SBU employee who joined the territorial defense forces is also being held as a prisoner of war, even though he was not participating in the armed conflict at the time of his detention. Regardless of status, the prohibition against torture, enforced disappearance, cruel treatment, and the denial of basic procedural guarantees remains absolute.

Unlawful criminal prosecution manifests itself in the application of Russian laws on “treason,” “terrorism,” “terrorist organization,” “espionage,” “training in terrorist activities,” and “public incitement to terrorism” against Ukrainian citizens residing in the occupied territory or who have been forcibly displaced to Russia. The charges were based on prior service in Ukrainian units, pro-Ukrainian comments, photographs from a work log, family correspondence, unsubstantiated statements by fabricated witnesses, or assumptions regarding assistance to partisans.

Criminal prosecution for Ukrainian identity, political beliefs, ties to Ukraine, or refusal to support the occupying authorities may, given certain contextual elements, constitute persecution as a crime against humanity. The June testimonies are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to prove a widespread or systematic attack; however, they contain relevant episodes for analyzing the broader policy of persecution.

5. TRANSIT ROUTES

Transit routes illustrate the interconnectedness of unofficial places of detention, occupation police units, pretrial detention centers, courts, and penal colonies in the occupied territories and in the Russian Federation. At least thirteen key victims passed through two or more places of detention or transit points.

The first route involves a woman who attempted to leave the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia Oblast in April 2026. In 2022, she had already been detained for approximately two weeks at an unidentified location in Melitopol. During this second incident, she left the village of Chernihivka as part of a group of passengers, was removed from the vehicle at an unidentified location, taken to

a pretrial detention center in Luhansk, where she remained for approximately fourteen days, and then transferred to the Rostov Oblast. The specific facility in the Rostov Oblast is unknown.

The route taken by a former serviceman from Energodar has been partially reconstructed: he was detained at home in August 2025, held in Rostov-on-Don during the investigation and trial, and sentenced by the Southern District Military Court to 19 years in a strict-regime penal colony; his family does not know where he is currently serving his sentence.

A man from the village of Groza was detained in 2022 and taken to an unknown location. Until May 2023, his family did not know where he was. In the spring of 2024, information emerged that he was being held in the village of Fornosovo in the Leningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation. In June 2024, it was reported that he was being held in a pretrial detention center in St. Petersburg, where a court hearing took place in August 2024. According to the latest information, he remained in St. Petersburg.

A Zaporizhzhia NPP employee was detained in Energodar in December 2024 and taken to a pretrial detention center in Melitopol. There were reports of a possible subsequent transfer to Mariupol, but it has not been confirmed that such a transfer actually took place. As of the time of documentation, his final whereabouts remain unknown.

One of the longest routes was documented in the case of a man from Novooleksiivka: his own home — the basement of the former vocational school No. 17 in Henichesk — the Chongar district — the pretrial detention center in Simferopol — Dzhankoy, where court hearings took place and the sentence was handed down — a penal colony in the Krasnodar Krai — Petrozavodsk in the Republic of Karelia. The testimony also notes the risk of further relocation after the completion of his sentence to the area near the Russian-Georgian border.

The man’s route from Tarasivka was shorter but included several unofficial locations: his own home—a school in the village of Basan—a private house converted into a detention facility—another facility where the torture intensified—release and return home. The next day, the victim left for Zaporizhzhia.

The man, who was detained on the street in Melitopol, was initially held for a long time in an old police building on Mykhailo Hrushevsky Street. After about six months or a year, he was transferred to Mariupol, where he also remained for approximately one year. He was then transferred to Rostov-on-Don, to Pretrial Detention Center No. 2, where he remains while his case is pending.

The full sequence of events in the case of this security guard, who has been detained multiple times, has not been established. During the first two episodes, he was held for about half a year each time and transferred roughly once every two months between the Azov region, Yakymivka, Melitopol, and other unknown locations. After his third detention in the summer of 2025, he was held in

Donetsk; he was transported to Melitopol for court hearings and later, presumably, transferred to Simferopol.

A former employee of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Border Guard Service was detained in Kherson. Initially, he was held at an unknown location in the Kherson region; in the fall of 2022, he was transferred to Crimea, and later to the village of Pakino in the Vladimir region of the Russian Federation. His presence there was confirmed by a letter, a photograph, and the testimonies of released cellmates.

A young man from Kalanchak was detained at home and subsequently held in Chongar until June 2025. He was later transferred to Penal Colony No. 4 in the city of Pugachev, Saratov Oblast.

A man from Kutuzivka was taken after his arrest to the village of Vesele in the Kharkiv district, which was used as a detention site for civilians. He was subsequently transported to Stary Oskol in the Russian Federation. His subsequent route and current whereabouts remain unknown.

In the case of the woman from Crimea, the first stage involved a search in Maly Mayak, her transfer to the FSB office in Simferopol, an eight-hour detention, and her release on condition that she not leave the country. After being detained again on June 23, 2026, she disappeared without a trace. Her attorney reported that she had been convicted but did not know where she was being held. The testimony mentions that the case was transferred to Rostov-on-Don and that a trial was scheduled to take place in Moscow; however, the actual route of her transfer has not been established.

A civilian from Hostomel was transported through Belarus after his arrest and then flown to the Russian Federation. According to various reports, he may have been held in Ufa and later in a penal colony near the village of Donskoye in the Tula Region.

Two men from the village of Krynok were initially held at the police station in Oleshky, where their families were allowed to bring them personal belongings and food. A few days later, they were taken to Hola Prystan, and then to a barracks or another unofficial facility near the sea. At this location, one of them was tortured to death. The subsequent route of the second man is unknown.

6. DETENTION CONDITIONS

Detention conditions varied significantly depending on the location, but were generally characterized by unsuitable facilities, overcrowding, a lack of adequate food, dependence on food parcels, limited medical care, censorship, and the constant threat of violence.

In a private house in the village of Basan, the victim was held in an empty room with nothing but four walls and an interrogation chair. There was no water or

toilet. The man kept his eyes closed almost the entire time or could not see his captors because of their masks.

At the Energodar police station, one of the victims was held in a cell measuring approximately three by four meters along with twelve to seventeen other people. The cell contained bunk beds, a table, stools, a sink, and a toilet. Another cell had no running water. The victim's food supply depended on care packages from his wife. Due to overcrowding, some of the detainees, according to their cellmates, were transferred to Kamianka-Dniprovska.

Another victim was held at the same police station for seven days. At first, she spent the night in a metal cage in a hall that had previously been used for court hearings. The cell contained two bunks, a sink, a toilet behind a partition, and only a small barred opening instead of a proper window. She reported the presence of three cells and a so-called "pit," where people were tortured with particular cruelty. On the fifth day, she smelled a strong odor of burning and heard the sounds of beatings coming from the upper floor. During her first detention, the woman ran out of her diabetes medication. She was released only after she reported this. The blood glucose meter that had been confiscated was not returned to her. After her release, her health deteriorated sharply: she suffered a massive heart attack, had a stent implanted, and experienced worsening conditions in her kidneys, lungs, and bones. She met with a psychologist three times.

In one of the Kharkiv cases, a released cellmate reported systematic sleep deprivation: detainees were allowed to sleep for two hours, after which they were denied sleep for two hours, and this pattern was repeated throughout the night. Sleep deprivation, depending on its intensity and purpose, may constitute torture or inhuman treatment.

A young man transferred from Chongar to the Saratov region is in poor health due to limited access to treatment, necessary food, and adequate medical care. A similar problem is evident in the case of a man with kidney disease, epilepsy, and high blood pressure, who receives unidentified medications but takes them irregularly. In the case of a man held in St. Petersburg, medication and essential supplies are delivered through volunteers. He has experienced heart problems and high blood pressure, and an ultrasound examination was performed. His family had only one brief phone call lasting about thirty seconds.

In many cases, correspondence is censored. Detainees cannot directly report torture, their whereabouts, or their health condition. This means that the absence of mentions of violence in letters cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence of proper treatment. Relatives explicitly state that detainees are either unable to speak about such matters or avoid giving details so as not to put themselves in danger or traumatize their families.

Weight loss is a separate issue. According to his family, a man who weighed approximately 80–90 kilograms before his detention has lost weight, now

weighing 50–60 kilograms. Another man was brought home after one of his previous detentions so emaciated and beaten that his relatives believed he had been released so he would not die in custody.

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

Direct information about court proceedings is available in at least eight cases. Five victims received convictions. The sentences ranged from 4 years and 3 months to 20 years of imprisonment. Collectively, the five recorded sentences total more than 62 years of imprisonment.

A former serviceman from Energodar was sentenced by the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don to 19 years in a strict-regime penal colony for participating in a "terrorist group" and undergoing training for the purpose of carrying out terrorist activities. The basis for the prosecution was his service in a Ukrainian battalion from 2017 to 2020, although he was not a military servicemember at the time of his arrest.

A man from Novooleksiivka was sentenced to 4 years and 3 months. According to a relative, false witnesses were used during the trial who claimed that he was detained on a bridge while attempting to "blow up Simferopol," although in reality he was taken from his home after returning from work. The victim's father was forcibly removed from the courtroom. No appeal was filed.

The man, who had been detained multiple times, was sentenced to 14 years in a strict-regime penal colony for "treason." The hearings were closed to the public, and his mother was not allowed into the courtroom. The court-appointed attorney stated that he had five or six similar cases and was effectively unable to influence the outcome. The occupying authorities publicly circulated videos of the arrest, interrogation, and trial.

A woman from occupied Crimea was sentenced to 5 years and 6 months in prison for comments she made online. Prior to her arrest, a local lawyer had assured her that the case would likely result in a fine. After the verdict was handed down, he did not know where his client was being held, even though her phone and documents remained in his possession.

As for the man being held in Rostov-on-Don, court hearings take place almost every month and are constantly postponed. No final verdict has been handed down, even though he has been in custody since April 2023. The public defender does not maintain contact with the relatives and, in their assessment, is not providing an effective defense.

In the case of the man from the village of Groza, the public defender was barred from attending one of the court hearings. Subsequently, the attorney left Russia. The family received information about the trial through the media and volunteer channels, rather than through official notifications.

In the case of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant employee, after the first court hearing, the charge was changed from manufacturing explosive substances to "treason." The family's access to case files and information about his current place of detention is limited.

Systemic problems include the closed nature of the proceedings, the exclusion of relatives and attorneys, the purely formal nature of the appointed defense, the lack of regular contact between the lawyer and the family, the use of military courts, the inability to independently verify evidence, the coerced or propagandistic presentation of a confession, the use of false witnesses, and the criminalization of actions that do not constitute a crime under the laws of the occupying state.

Under international humanitarian law, the deliberate deprivation of a protected person's right to a fair and due trial may constitute a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime. The application of Russian criminal law in the occupied territory—particularly to prosecute individuals for loyalty to Ukraine, prior service in Ukrainian institutions, or political statements—requires assessment in light of the restrictions imposed on the occupying power.

8. INFORMATION ON OTHER VICTIMS AND THE BROADER CONTEXT

In addition to the seventeen primary victims, the testimonies specifically mention more than thirty other individuals who were detained, held together with the primary victims, subjected to criminal prosecution, torture, coercion, disappearance, or death. An even wider circle of people is described without names or detailed information.

In the case of the ambulance worker, there are reports of her husband's prior detention and her son's two-week detention. In the case of the man from Tarasivka, his mother was held for about two months in Melitopol, and at least two other men were held with him at an unofficial location in Basan.

In the case of a security guard who had been detained multiple times, the occupying forces detained him, interrogated him using a polygraph, and threatened his mother. The court-appointed attorney reported five or six additional similar cases, which may indicate a pattern of serial criminal prosecution following this model.

Testimony from a former SBU employee includes information about the detention of the former mayor of Kherson, another member of the territorial defense forces, and a group of civilians who were transported to Crimea. According to relatives, some of these individuals were held together with prisoners of war.

Firsthand testimony from a Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant employee provides

detailed information on at least five fellow detainees. Among them were a psychologist at a training center, an employee of a metal warehouse, a local man whose relatives were used to coerce him into surrendering, a man suspected of a general criminal offense, and the head of a local State Emergency Service unit. Some of them were severely beaten, subjected to electric shocks, and had mock executions or simulated gunshot wounds.

A retiree from Energodar saw another woman at the police station—an ZNPP employee whose body was covered in bruises. She also saw an employee of the Zaporizhzhia Thermal Power Plant who was forced to dig trenches. After her release, she learned of the detention of the head of a homeowners' association, two ZNPP employees, and another resident of Energodar. One of these men reported that there were about thirty people in the room at the same time, and due to overcrowding, it was impossible to stand or sit comfortably.

The Kharkiv case file mentions a businesswoman who was held in the village of Vesele for three to four days, as well as three released individuals who confirmed that the main victim had been there. This information indicates that the village of Vesele was used as a detention center for civilians.

Two mutually corroborating testimonies from the village of Krynok point to a broader practice of detaining civilians in Krynok, Kozachi Lagery, Nova Kakhovka, and surrounding settlements. The occupying forces used allegations of feeding partisans or storing weapons as a pretext. Detaining people in vacation homes, barracks, and other facilities in the coastal zone made it more difficult to locate them and concealed evidence of violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The June testimonies reveal a long-standing, multi-tiered system of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, in which the initial abduction of a civilian is often only the first stage. This may be followed by incommunicado detention, torture, transfer through several unofficial and official institutions, deportation to the Russian Federation, criminalization, and the imposition of lengthy prison sentences.

The vast majority of victims are men; however, being male is associated with other risk factors: prior military or law enforcement service, working in critical infrastructure, living in a community with active resistance, family ties to military personnel, a pro-Ukrainian stance, or possession of weapons. At the same time, some of the men had no direct connection to the hostilities.

Family ties are used as a tool of persecution. Mothers, sons, and other relatives were detained, searched, interrogated, or tortured to extract information about another person. This indicates that repression is directed not only against specific suspects but also against their social and family circles.

Torture is a recurring element. Beatings and electric shocks are used particularly frequently, but there have also been reports of mock executions, forcing detainees to dig their own graves, sleep deprivation, threats against relatives, and deprivation of water, access to a toilet, and medication. In one case, according to available information, torture led to death.

Transfers serve not only a logistical but also a repressive function. Frequent transfers complicate the search for detainees, hinder contact with lawyers and family members, conceal acts of violence, and increase psychological uncertainty. At least half of the main victims were taken to the Russian Federation.

Criminal prosecutions bear the hallmarks of the political and occupation-driven instrumentalization of the law. Russian laws on “terrorism” and “treason” are applied to past service in Ukrainian military units, contact with relatives, photographs of work documents, statements on social media, and unverified accusations of aiding partisans. Trials are often held behind closed doors, with only a nominal defense and no real access for families to the evidence.

A large proportion of relatives’ testimonies reveals not only the scale of unlawful detention but also the systematic isolation of families from information. Families are forced to search for their loved ones on their own through Telegram channels, Russian volunteers, released cellmates, random videos, and unofficial contacts. Official information is often delayed, incomplete, or entirely absent.

The documented actions may contain elements of war crimes such as unlawful

detention, torture, inhuman treatment, unlawful transfer, intentional killing, and denial of the right to a fair trial. Certain incidents require verification regarding the taking of hostages. The body of evidence is also relevant to the investigation of possible crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances, imprisonment, torture, persecution, and murder.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results of the analysis of testimony from witnesses and individuals unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty as a result of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as the identified recurring patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, it is advisable to take the following measures:

1. Law enforcement agencies:

a) ensure the continuous and systematic documentation of cases of unlawful deprivation of liberty, including the circumstances of detention, places and conditions of detention, the routes taken by detainees, the use of torture and cruel treatment, as well as related judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings. Such documentation must be carried out in accordance with the standards of admissibility of evidence in national and international criminal proceedings.

b) integrate the collected testimony into the work of Ukraine's pre-trial investigation authorities and use it to classify the relevant acts as war crimes and, where the necessary elements are present, crimes against humanity, in particular enforced disappearances, unlawful detention, torture, and persecution of the civilian population.

c) regularly analyze 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 protracted armed conflict.

d) Identify the staging and forced displacement of civilians—in particular, deportation to the territory of the Russian Federation—as separate instances of international crimes, with the aim of ensuring proper criminal law assessment and enhancing the effectiveness of investigations. Such actions must be documented separately from the initial unlawful detention and must include establishing the role of escort units, the administrations of places of detention, and so-called "judicial" bodies in the temporarily occupied territories. The relevant facts should serve as the basis for opening separate criminal proceedings under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, taking into account the cumulative nature of the violations of international humanitarian law.

e) Pay special attention to conducting forensic medical and forensic psychiatric examinations in accordance with the UN Istanbul Protocol. This refers, in particular, to documenting the consequences of torture and ill-treatment, including injuries from electric shocks, systematic beatings, as well as psychological disorders, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder.

f) Establish a centralized database of such expert opinions, which would ensure the consistency of the evidence base, prevent the re-traumatization

of victims, and help identify typical patterns of violence.

g) Include in the evidence strategy a systematic approach to collecting and documenting evidence related to the registration of detainees. This includes correspondence and confirmations from the International Committee of the Red Cross, registration data from places of detention, information on "transfer" and individual identifiers from the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation, as well as extracts from so-called "personal accounts" or electronic record-keeping systems. Separately, the practice of "appointed" or occupation-controlled lawyers refusing to transfer case materials to families or representatives of victims should be documented as an element of obstructing the right to defense and access to information.

h) Establish a separate procedural approach for classifying the activities of the so-called "courts" in the temporarily occupied territories. The unlawful detention of civilians, the handing down of unlawful sentences, and the subsequent transfer of detainees beyond the occupied territory to the Russian Federation should be documented as separate complex crimes encompassing the categories of unlawful deprivation of liberty, denial of the right to a fair trial, and deportation of the civilian population.

i) Separately systematize and investigate the persecution of current and former employees of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant as a distinct risk profile. Given the repeated reports of detentions, searches, coercion to sign contracts with "Rosatom," staff questioning, phone inspections, beatings, keeping employees in handcuffs, threats, and pressure on individuals who refused to cooperate with the occupying administration, it is advisable for law enforcement agencies to designate the Zaporizhzhia NPP and the city of Energodar as a separate analytical focus for documentation. As part of this effort, a list should be compiled of affected plant employees, including their positions, departments, dates of detention, places of detention, circumstances of coercion to cooperate, as well as the individuals and entities involved in detentions, interrogations, questioning, and monitoring of personnel.

2. To executive authorities:

a) Ensure that the status of persons who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty is properly recognized, including access to social, legal, and psychological protection. The procedures for such recognition must be people-centered, must not place an excessive burden of proof on the victims, and must take into account the specific nature of crimes committed under occupation.

b) strengthen international cooperation to exchange information regarding the locations where civilian hostages are being held, the conditions of their detention, and those responsible, and use the collected evidence in international mechanisms, particularly within the framework of the International Criminal Court (ICC), universal jurisdiction, and sanctions regimes.

c) Develop specialized treatment and rehabilitation programs for individuals released from places of unlawful detention. Such programs should include treatment for chronic diseases and complications, particularly cardiovascular and renal pathologies, the consequences of prolonged starvation (anorexia, severe weight loss), as well as dental complications.

d) Provide long-term psychosocial support to the families of individuals who are being held incommunicado or are considered missing.

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

f) Document the militarization of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant and related violations not only as a threat to nuclear safety but also as a context for the unlawful deprivation of liberty of civilians. Evidence regarding the deployment of military personnel, equipment, and ammunition; the use of the plant's facilities; the rotation of security forces; personnel monitoring; the collection of personal data; forced labor; and the persecution of employees must be analyzed in conjunction with one another. It is important for international institutions—particularly those dealing with nuclear safety issues—to emphasize that the occupying forces' control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant was accompanied not only by technological risks but also by repression against civilian personnel, including unlawful detentions, forced displacement, torture, psychological pressure, and coercion to cooperate.

g) Ensure priority support for the families of detained or missing ZNPP employees and residents of Energodar, particularly regarding search efforts, legal assistance, medical care, and documentation. In many cases in Energodar, families independently determined the whereabouts of the affected individuals, contacted the occupying authorities, Ukrainian government agencies, and international organizations, paid for communications, travel, and attorneys, and maintained communication through controlled channels. Given the particular risk faced by critical infrastructure workers and their families, it is advisable to establish or strengthen a dedicated support mechanism for such families: including the formal recognition of the status of a missing or unlawfully detained person, assistance in gathering documents, preparation of appeals to national and international bodies, as well as the systematic transmission of information for the investigation of war crimes related to the occupying forces' control over the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

3. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine:

a) Advocate for the ICRC's access to specific pretrial detention centers and penal colonies on the territory of the Russian Federation where, according to documented evidence, civilians who have been unlawfully deprived of

their personal liberty are being held. This includes, among others, facilities in Krasnodar, Volgograd, Kazan, Irkutsk, the Republic of Buryatia, the Saratov Oblast, and the Republic of Mordovia.

b) systematically raise the issue of documented routes of deportation and detention of civilians in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic forums to advocate for their release.

4. To international institutions and human rights organizations:

a) Use the documented routes of movement, conditions of detention, classifications under articles of the Russian Federation's criminal code, and described practices regarding the treatment of detainees to prepare targeted submissions to the International Criminal Court and the UN special procedures on torture and enforced disappearances.

b) Use the documented routes of transfer, conditions of detention, classifications under articles of the Russian Federation's criminal code, and the described practices regarding the treatment of detainees to initiate personal and sectoral sanctions regimes against the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation and its associated "judicial" and administrative bodies.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND CUMULATIVE INDICATORS

Since 2022, documenters from the NGO “Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners” have identified and interviewed more than 715 people—witnesses and victims of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and other international crimes against the civilian population. Of these, 17 individuals were identified and documented during a documentation effort in May 2026. At the same time, the total number of individuals identified by the Association through documentation, the use of OSINT, and cooperation with human rights actors exceeds 1,000 people who have been unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty. The documented violations include, first and foremost, unlawful deprivation of personal liberty, as well as shelling of civilian infrastructure, appropriation of private property by the occupying forces, and other related crimes.

The Documentation Department and the Research and Analytics Department of the NGO “Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin” carried out the documentation of war crimes and prepared this analytical review.



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