

TAKEN FROM OCCUPIED TOWNS: UKRAINE'S CIVILIAN DETAINEES

Since 2022 Russian forces and occupation authorities have detained Ukrainian civilians — local officials, journalists, volunteers, people with pro-Ukrainian views — held them without status or charge, tortured most of them and moved many to prisons in Russia. Families are rarely told where they are. The UN estimates that more than 16,000 are still held; the UN Commission of Inquiry has found the torture and the enforced disappearances to be crimes against humanity.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

DRAFT — not published. Figures checked on 27 Oct 2026 against the OHCHR thematic reports of 27 Jun 2023 and 23 Sep 2025, the OHCHR periodic report of 29 Jun 2026, the UN ASG briefing of 10 Aug 2026 (via Euronews), the Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/58/67; A/HRC/61/61; press releases of Oct 2024 and 19 Mar 2025), the EU listing of 13 Jul 2026, the UK sanctions notice of 1 Oct 2026, the Ombudsman (27 Jun 2026), CPJ and the Office of the Prosecutor General. Paragraph numbers to be re-checked against the PDFs before print.

16,000+

Ukrainian civilians detained since Feb 2022 still deprived of their liberty, by the UN's estimate A

UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States, 10 Aug 2026

85%

of 403 released civilian detainees interviewed by the UN reported torture or ill-treatment A

UN ASG for Human Rights, 10 Aug 2026

43

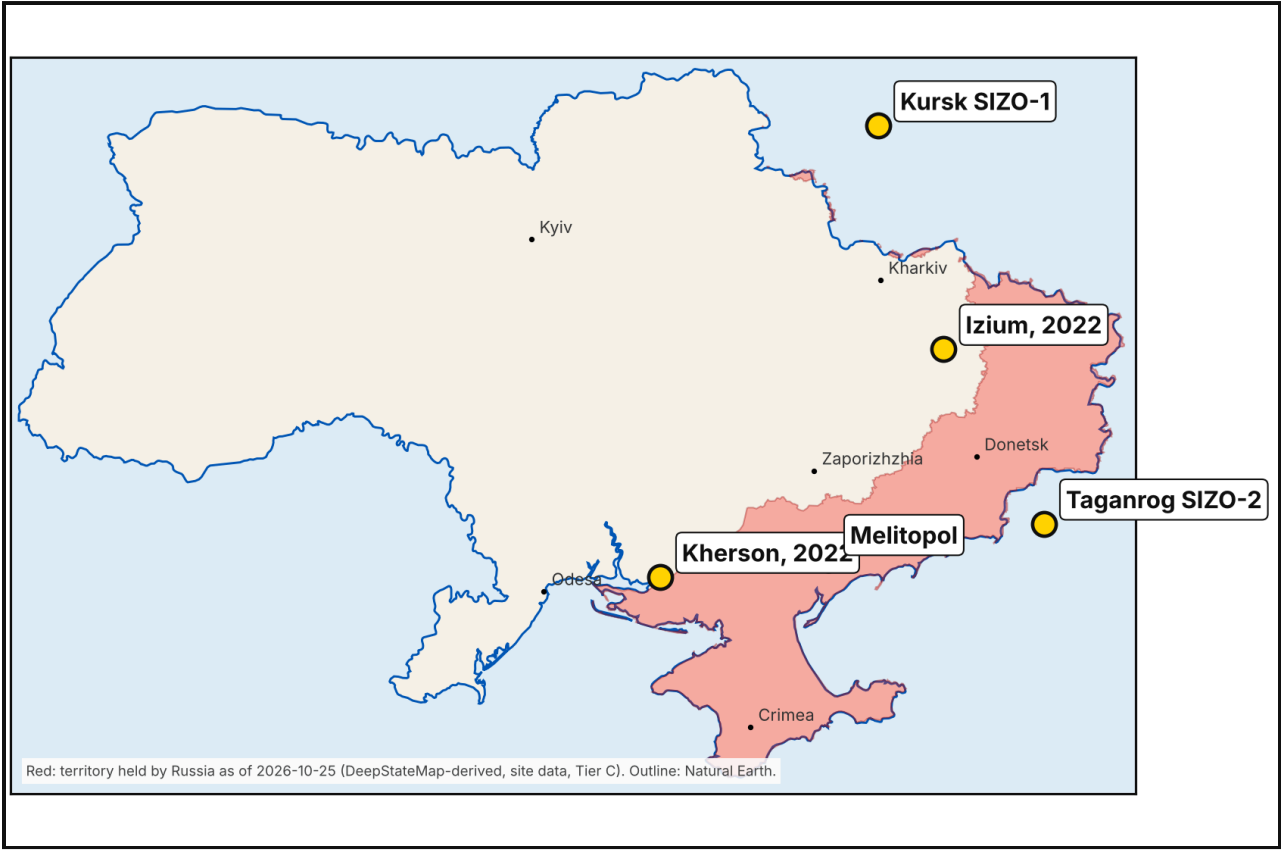
civilian detainees who died in Russian custody from torture, denial of medical care or inhuman conditions (34 men, 9 women) A

OHCHR periodic report, 29 Jun 2026, para 112

1,878

cases of civilians held by Russia confirmed by Ukraine; only 892 verified through the ICRC B

Ombudsman of Ukraine, 27 Jun 2026



BOTTOM LINE

A policy, not excess. The UN Commission of Inquiry found torture by Russian authorities (Oct 2024) and enforced disappearances (Mar 2025) to be crimes against humanity, committed in every province under Russian control 'pursuant to a coordinated state policy'.

Held without a trace. Civilians are held incommunicado in official and unofficial places — OHCHR counted 161 official and 42 unofficial places in occupied territory and 73 in Russia — and families receive standard replies that do not say where they are.

The ask is access and accounting. Russia has answered none of the Commission's 39 requests and gives the UN no access; the ICRC's last visit in Russia was in 2024. Every list, every visit and every release is the measurable ask.

LEGAL QUALIFICATION IN THREE LAYERS

TORTURE AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE AS CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY — ESTABLISHED (UN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, 2024-25)

INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION, TRANSFER TO RUSSIA, TRIALS ON 'TERRORISM' AND 'ESPIONAGE' — PATTERN (OHCHR; COI)

HOSTAGE-TAKING AND UNLAWFUL CONFINEMENT, GC IV ART. 147 — POSITION (UKRAINE)

Established. UN Commission of Inquiry: torture (Oct 2024) and enforced disappearances (A/HRC/58/67, Mar 2025) by Russian authorities are crimes against humanity; deporting civilians to Russia for trial, and the unfair trials themselves, are war crimes (A/HRC/61/61). **Pattern.** OHCHR: torture 'systematic and widespread' against civilians in detention (2025). **Position.** Ukraine qualifies the practice as hostage-taking and unlawful confinement.

WHAT WE ASK

Demand full ICRC and UN access to every place where Ukrainian civilians are held, lists of all detainees for the families, and the unconditional release of civilians as a track separate from prisoner-of-war exchanges.

FROM A CHECKPOINT TO A CELL IN RUSSIA

The path repeats across occupied territory: a search at a checkpoint or a 'filtration' point, a list of local officials and activists, a night arrest, weeks in a basement or a police building, transfer to a pre-trial centre in Russia, and either years without any status or a trial for 'terrorism'. At no step are the family told.

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11 Mar 2022	Melitopol: about ten men seize the elected mayor, Ivan Fedorov, from his office; released on 16 Mar in exchange for nine Russian servicemen. B — Office of the President of Ukraine via Ukrinform, 17 Mar 2022
Mar 2022	Dniprorudne: former mayor Yevhenii Matveev detained; his body is returned in an exchange, the death certificate giving 'blunt injury to the torso with multiple fractures' (family told Nov 2024). A — Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/58/67, para 14
Mar - Nov 2022	Kherson under occupation: 'twenty or more' detention sites in and around the city, among them the SIZO, the airport and police buildings; the UN later names Kherson's SIZO and temporary detention centre among places of confirmed torture. A — HRW via Ukrinform, 16 Apr 2023; Col A/HRC/58/67, Annex III
27 Jun 2023	OHCHR: 864 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by Russia; more than 91% describe torture; 77 civilians summarily executed in detention; 26% transferred or deported to Russia. A — OHCHR thematic report on detention of civilians, 27 Jun 2023
3 Aug 2023	Journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna goes missing in occupied Zaporizhzhia region; Russia acknowledges holding her only in spring 2024. A — Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/58/67, para 13; CPJ
19 Sep 2024	Roshchyna dies in Russian custody after about a year in Taganrog SIZO-2; her body is returned on 14 Feb 2025 with signs of torture. C — CPJ; Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine
29 Oct 2024	UN Commission of Inquiry: torture by Russian authorities, of civilians and prisoners of war, is a crime against humanity. A — UN Commission of Inquiry, report to the General Assembly
19 Mar 2025	UN Commission of Inquiry: enforced disappearances by Russian authorities are crimes against humanity. A — A/HRC/58/67
23 Sep 2025	OHCHR: more than 92% of 216 released civilians interviewed describe torture; 38 deaths in custody; 179 civilians returned in the May and August 2025 exchanges. A — OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty, 23 Sep 2025
30 Mar 2026	Commission of Inquiry: 72 trials examined (68 civilians); charges of terrorism, espionage and 'violent seizure of power'; confessions under torture; deporting civilians to Russia for trial is a war crime. A — A/HRC/61/61
10 Aug 2026	UN Assistant Secretary-General: more than 16,000 civilians detained since 2022 are still held; 85% of 403 interviewed civilian detainees tortured. A — UN ASG for Human Rights via Euronews, 12 Aug 2026
13 Jul - 1 Oct 2026	EU lists SIZO-2 Taganrog and FSB officer Yan Zanevsky; the UK designates eight individuals, among them Kherson's military commandant, for detention and torture of civilians. B — EEAS, 14 Jul 2026; UK Sanctions Notice, 1 Oct 2026

WHAT THE UN ESTABLISHED

OHCHR (2025): torture 'applied in a systematic and widespread manner against civilians in places of detention'; detainees held in 161 official and 42 unofficial places in occupied territory and in 73 places in Russia; the FSB played a central role in arrests and interrogations, alongside the armed forces, Rosgvardia, the penitentiary service and police.

Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/58/67): a corroborated sample of almost 100 disappearances, more than half lasting over two years; over 280 letters from Russian entities to families that failed to disclose fate or whereabouts; places of confirmed torture named in Annex III — Taganrog SIZO-2, Kursk SIZO-1, Novozybkov SIZO-2, Kherson's SIZO and temporary detention centre, Izium's police department and railway hospital.

PHOTO SLOT · DRAFT

Exterior of a documented Kherson or Izium detention site after liberation — openly licensed (Commons CC BY / CC BY-SA, or DSNS / SBU CC BY 4.0); no detainees, no bodies

Photo slot · official or openly licensed source · no people in custody

WHO IS TAKEN

Local officials and civil servants, journalists, people with pro-Ukrainian views, volunteers, former law-enforcement staff and relatives of servicemembers (Col A/HRC/58/67, paras 9 and 15).

Most are men; OHCHR's 2023 sample was 763 men, 94 women and 7 boys. Some of those tried in Russia were 16 or 17 at arrest (A/HRC/61/61, para 23).

Sources: A — OHCHR thematic report on the detention of civilians (27 Jun 2023); OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty (23 Sep 2025); OHCHR periodic report (29 Jun 2026); UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States (10 Aug 2026, via Euronews); UN Commission of Inquiry: report to the General Assembly (Oct 2024), A/HRC/58/67 (Mar 2025), A/HRC/61/61 (Mar 2026), Chair's statement (12 Mar 2026). ICRC — operational FAQ (29 Sep 2026). B — Ombudsman of Ukraine via LB.ua (27 Jun 2026); Office of the Prosecutor General; Office of the President via Ukrinform (17 Mar 2022); EU Council via EEAS (14 Jul 2026); UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026); US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022). C — CPJ; Human Rights Watch via Ukrinform (16 Apr 2023); Forbidden Stories; Euronews. RU — statements as cited, answered on page 5.



THREE UN REPORTS, ONE OPEN NUMBER

The UN's figures come from interviews with people who came back; they are minimums. Ukraine's figures count reports from families; the ICRC has verified fewer than one in two of Ukraine's confirmed cases. The gap between them is what Russia's refusal of access produces.

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ESTABLISHED BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

OHCHR, 27 Jun 2023: 864 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by Russia; >91% tortured; 77 summary executions in detention. A

OHCHR, 23 Sep 2025: >92% of 216 released civilians tortured; 38 deaths in custody; 90 extrajudicial executions; at least 123 families with no or vague information. A

OHCHR periodic report, 29 Jun 2026: 43 deaths of civilian detainees since 2022; 195 civilian detainees among victims of sexual violence; 10 of 11 released men interviewed in the period tortured. A

UN ASG for Human Rights, 10 Aug 2026: more than 16,000 civilians still held; 85% of 403 interviewed civilian detainees tortured; no UN access to Russian facilities. A

UKRAINIAN INVESTIGATION

Ombudsman of Ukraine, 27 Jun 2026: 1,878 confirmed cases; about 16,000 estimated; 892 verified through the ICRC; civilians often held together with POWs. B

Office of the Prosecutor General: notice of suspicion in absentia to the head of Taganrog SIZO-2 over the torture of Viktoriia Roshchyna (art. 28(2), art. 438(1) CCU). B

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS

CPJ: Roshchyna's detention, death and the forensic findings; HRW (Apr 2023): 20 or more detention sites in and around Kherson, 34 survivors interviewed. C

THE NUMBERS — EVERY SOURCE, AS PUBLISHED

Figure	What it counts	Source · date · tier
864 → 16,000+	civilian cases documented by OHCHR (2023) → civilians still held by the UN's estimate (Aug 2026): a documented sample and an estimate, not a series	OHCHR · A
>91% · >92% · 85%	share of interviewed civilian detainees who described torture in three UN samples (2023, 2025, 2026) — different samples, not a trend	OHCHR · A
1,878 · 892	civilians confirmed by Ukraine · of them verified through the ICRC	Ombudsman · B
39	written requests of the Commission of Inquiry that Russia has left unanswered	CoI, 12 Mar 2026 · A

PHOTO SLOT · DRAFT

Document shot: the OHCHR report cover of 23 Sep 2025 or the Commission's report A/HRC/58/67

Photo slot · documents and institutions

For balance (OHCHR 2023): 75 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by Ukrainian security forces, 57% of interviewees describing torture or ill-treatment. Ukraine gives the UN full access; Russia gives none.

Sources: A — OHCHR thematic report on the detention of civilians (27 Jun 2023); OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty (23 Sep 2025); OHCHR periodic report (29 Jun 2026); UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States (10 Aug 2026, via Euronews); UN Commission of Inquiry: report to the General Assembly (Oct 2024), A/HRC/58/67 (Mar 2025), A/HRC/61/61 (Mar 2026), Chair's statement (12 Mar 2026). ICRC — operational FAQ (29 Sep 2026). B — Ombudsman of Ukraine via LB.ua (27 Jun 2026); Office of the Prosecutor General; Office of the President via Ukrinform (17 Mar 2022); EU Council via EEAS (14 Jul 2026); UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026); US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022). C — CPJ; Human Rights Watch via Ukrinform (16 Apr 2023); Forbidden Stories; Euronews. RU — statements as cited, answered on page 5.



FROM THE FSB OFFICER TO THE PRISON GOVERNOR

The UN names the agencies; the EU and the UK have begun to name the people. Ukrainian prosecutors have served notices of suspicion in absentia.

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Who	Role in the case	Proceedings	Sanctions · courts
Federal Security Service (FSB)	Central role in arrests and interrogations; where present, the highest authority in detention facilities (OHCHR 2025, para 52; Col A/HRC/58/67, para 39)	—	FSB officer Yan Zanevsky: EU, 13 Jul 2026; UK, 1 Oct 2026 (detention and torture of civilians in Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia)
Investigative Committee	Drafted charges of terrorism, treason, espionage, sabotage; fabricated evidence (Col A/HRC/58/67, para 44; A/HRC/61/61, para 28)	—	—
Taganrog pre-trial detention centre No. 2	Place of confirmed torture (Col Annex III); held Viktoriia Roshchyna	Ukraine: notice of suspicion to its head (art. 28(2), 438(1) CCU)	EU: listed as an entity, 13 Jul 2026
Penal colony No. 10, Udarny	Civilians 'held without trial and status' (EU)	—	EU: head of the colony and five deputies, 13 Jul 2026
Occupation commandants and police	Detention and torture of civilians in Kherson region, Tokmak, Kamianka-Dniprovska	—	UK: eight individuals incl. the Military Commandant of Kherson Region, 1 Oct 2026
Filtration	Interrogation, searches and data collection, linked to deportations, disappearances and torture	—	US Treasury: designations of 9 Dec 2022

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Arrest by the FSB, Rosgvardia or the armed forces → incommunicado in an unofficial site → official SIZO in occupied territory or Russia → charge by the Investigative Committee → trial under Russian law, or years without status (OHCHR 2025; Col A/HRC/58/67 and A/HRC/61/61).

Families write to the Russian Ministry of Defence and receive standard replies; some cite the Third Geneva Convention — which does not apply to civilians (Col A/HRC/58/67, para 26).

THE RUSSIAN STATE'S OWN ACTS

Russia has answered none of the Commission of Inquiry's 39 written requests and left OHCHR's note verbale of 16 Jan 2026 unanswered.

10 Aug 2026, informal Security Council meeting: Russia's deputy representative says Russian forces comply with international humanitarian law.

Sanctions column: designations from the designating authorities' own releases — EEAS (14 Jul 2026), UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026), US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022).

Sources: A — OHCHR thematic report on the detention of civilians (27 Jun 2023); OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty (23 Sep 2025); OHCHR periodic report (29 Jun 2026); UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States (10 Aug 2026, via Euronews); UN Commission of Inquiry: report to the General Assembly (Oct 2024), A/HRC/58/67 (Mar 2025), A/HRC/61/61 (Mar 2026), Chair's statement (12 Mar 2026). ICRC — operational FAQ (29 Sep 2026). B — Ombudsman of Ukraine via LB.ua (27 Jun 2026); Office of the Prosecutor General; Office of the President via Ukrinform (17 Mar 2022); EU Council via EEAS (14 Jul 2026); UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026); US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022). C — CPJ; Human Rights Watch via Ukrinform (16 Apr 2023); Forbidden Stories; Euronews. RU — statements as cited, answered on page 5.



'NO PROCEDURAL STATUS'

Russia's line has three parts: its forces respect IHL; people it holds are 'terrorists' or 'spies' tried by courts; and where it is asked about a person, there is no record of them. The UN's findings answer each part.

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MARIA ZABOLOTSKAYA · RUSSIA'S DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE · 10 AUG 2026

"[Russian forces comply with international humanitarian law, including in their treatment of prisoners — as reported]"

Informal Security Council meeting; Euronews, 12 Aug 2026 (paraphrase)

TATYANA MOSKALKOVA · RUSSIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER · 2025

"[Roshchyna had no procedural status in Russia — as relayed]"

As relayed by Ukrainian MP Yurchyshyn; Ukrainska Pravda, 6 Mar 2025 (second-hand)

TAGANROG PRE-TRIAL DETENTION CENTRE · 27 DEC 2024

"[Its records show that Roshchyna had not been held there — as reported by CPJ]"

Reply to CPJ, 27 Dec 2024

RUSSIAN COURTS AND INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE · 2022 - 2026

"[Ukrainian civilians are charged with terrorism, espionage and violent seizure of power]"

Charges examined by the Commission of Inquiry, A/HRC/61/61

CONTRADICTED BY THE UN'S OWN INTERVIEWS

85% of 403 released civilian detainees interviewed by the UN reported torture or ill-treatment (UN ASG, 10 Aug 2026); 43 civilian detainees have died in custody (OHCHR, 29 Jun 2026); the Commission of Inquiry found torture to be a crime against humanity.

What the claim concedes: That Russia holds Ukrainian civilians.

DESCRIBES AN ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Holding a person with no status and no disclosed whereabouts is what the Commission of Inquiry defines as enforced disappearance (A/HRC/58/67). The Russian Ministry of Defence itself acknowledged holding her in spring 2024.

What the claim concedes: That she was held without any legal basis.

CONTRADICTED

Former detainees and investigations place her in Taganrog SIZO-2 from about December 2023; Ukraine served a notice of suspicion on its head; the EU listed the facility on 13 Jul 2026.

What the claim concedes: Nothing; the denial is itself the pattern the UN describes — families told nothing.

TRIALS FOUND TO BE WAR CRIMES

The Commission found confessions extracted by torture, evidence fabricated by the FSB and the Investigative Committee, and civilians deported to Russia for trial — grave breaches and war crimes (A/HRC/61/61, paras 21, 28, 41–42).

What the claim concedes: That Russia moved civilians from occupied territory to its own courts.

FAIR TO SAY

The figures measure different things: the UN's 16,000+ is an estimate of civilians still held; Ukraine's 1,878 is confirmed cases; OHCHR's 864 (2023) and 216 or 403 interviews are samples of people who came back. None is a full count, because Russia publishes no lists.

Ukraine also detains people: OHCHR documented 75 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by Ukrainian security forces (2023). The difference the UN records is access — granted by Ukraine, refused by Russia.

Sources: A — OHCHR thematic report on the detention of civilians (27 Jun 2023); OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty (23 Sep 2025); OHCHR periodic report (29 Jun 2026); UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States (10 Aug 2026, via Euronews); UN Commission of Inquiry: report to the General Assembly (Oct 2024), A/HRC/58/67 (Mar 2025), A/HRC/61/61 (Mar 2026), Chair's statement (12 Mar 2026). ICRC — operational FAQ (29 Sep 2026). B — Ombudsman of Ukraine via LB.ua (27 Jun 2026); Office of the Prosecutor General; Office of the President via Ukrinform (17 Mar 2022); EU Council via EEAS (14 Jul 2026); UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026); US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022). C — CPJ; Human Rights Watch via Ukrinform (16 Apr 2023); Forbidden Stories; Euronews. RU — statements as cited, answered on page 5.

CIVILIANS
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CIVILIANS ARE PROTECTED PERSONS

An occupying power may intern civilians only for imperative reasons of security, by a regular procedure with review every six months, and must tell their families. Russia's practice fails each of these tests.

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ESTABLISHED — BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

UN Commission of Inquiry (Oct 2024): torture by Russian authorities of civilians and prisoners of war is a crime against humanity, under a coordinated state policy.

UN Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/58/67, Mar 2025): enforced disappearances by Russian authorities are crimes against humanity.

UN Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/61/61, Mar 2026): deporting civilians to Russia for trial, and the unfair trials, are war crimes and grave breaches.

PATTERN — WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

Incommunicado detention in official and unofficial places, transfer to Russia, torture to obtain confessions, standard replies to families (OHCHR 2023 and 2025; CoI).

Targeting of local officials, journalists, volunteers and people with pro-Ukrainian views (CoI A/HRC/58/67).

POSITION — UKRAINE'S QUALIFICATION

Ukraine qualifies the detention of its civilians as hostage-taking and unlawful confinement — grave breaches under art. 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention — and prosecutes under art. 438 of its Criminal Code. Pending international rulings on individual cases.

THE RULES THAT APPLY

Fourth Geneva Convention arts. 42, 43 and 78: internment only if absolutely necessary or for imperative reasons of security, by a regular procedure with periodic review; art. 76: accused protected persons detained in the occupied country, with visits by the ICRC; art. 49: deportations from occupied territory prohibited regardless of motive.

Arts. 106 and 136–137: an internment card to the family and the Central Tracing Agency; an official information bureau that forwards information without delay. Art. 147: unlawful deportation or confinement, torture and hostage-taking are grave breaches.

WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

The real number: Russia publishes no lists; the UN's 16,000+ is an estimate and Ukraine's 1,878 a count of confirmed cases.

How many have died: OHCHR's 43 deaths and 77 executions in detention are verified minimums.

Where each person is held: the UN names a handful of facilities; it counts many more official and unofficial places without naming them.

WHAT WE ASK

- Access.** Full, regular and unannounced ICRC and UN access to every place where Ukrainian civilians are held, in occupied territory and in Russia (GC IV art. 76; arts. 136–137).
- Lists for the families.** Russia should provide the names, places and legal status of every Ukrainian civilian it holds, through the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency.
- Release as a separate track.** Civilians are not prisoners of war and must not be an 'exchange fund': demand their unconditional release, apart from POW exchanges.
- Accountability.** Sanction the facilities and officers the UN and national authorities have named — Taganrog SIZO-2, FSB officers, occupation commandants — and support prosecutions under universal jurisdiction.

Sources: A — OHCHR thematic report on the detention of civilians (27 Jun 2023); OHCHR thematic report on civilians deprived of their liberty (23 Sep 2025); OHCHR periodic report (29 Jun 2026); UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, briefing to Member States (10 Aug 2026, via Euronews); UN Commission of Inquiry: report to the General Assembly (Oct 2024), A/HRC/58/67 (Mar 2025), A/HRC/61/61 (Mar 2026), Chair's statement (12 Mar 2026). ICRC — operational FAQ (29 Sep 2026). B — Ombudsman of Ukraine via LB.ua (27 Jun 2026); Office of the Prosecutor General; Office of the President via Ukrinform (17 Mar 2022); EU Council via EEAS (14 Jul 2026); UK Sanctions Notice (1 Oct 2026); US Treasury via Ukrinform (9 Dec 2022). C — CPJ; Human Rights Watch via Ukrinform (16 Apr 2023); Forbidden Stories; Euronews. RU — statements as cited, answered on page 5.

