

IZIUM: 447 GRAVES IN A FOREST

Six days after Iziium was liberated, police found a burial site of more than 440 graves in the pine forest by the municipal cemetery. In a week of exhumations, 447 bodies were recovered — 425 civilians, among them five children, and 22 soldiers; at least 30 bore signs of torture. Ten torture sites were documented in the town. Russia called it a lie and 'a second Bucha'. By 2026 every body had a name, and the first life sentence had been handed down in absentia.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
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DRAFT — not published. Draft for the editor. The burial site has no UN-mandated finding of its own: OHCHR's periodic reports record individual killings and disappearances in Iziium, and the Commission of Inquiry announced it would examine the site; figures for the graves are Ukrainian (Tier B) and independent (Tier C). The draft keeps that distinction. Photo slots from official sources (National Police, Kharkiv regional administration, CC BY) — no images of the dead.

447

bodies exhumed from the forest burial site, 16–23 Sep 2022: 425 civilians including 5 children, 22 soldiers B

Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office, 24 Sep 2022

30+

bodies with visible signs of torture — bound hands, ropes, broken limbs B

Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office, via AP, 2 Oct 2022

10

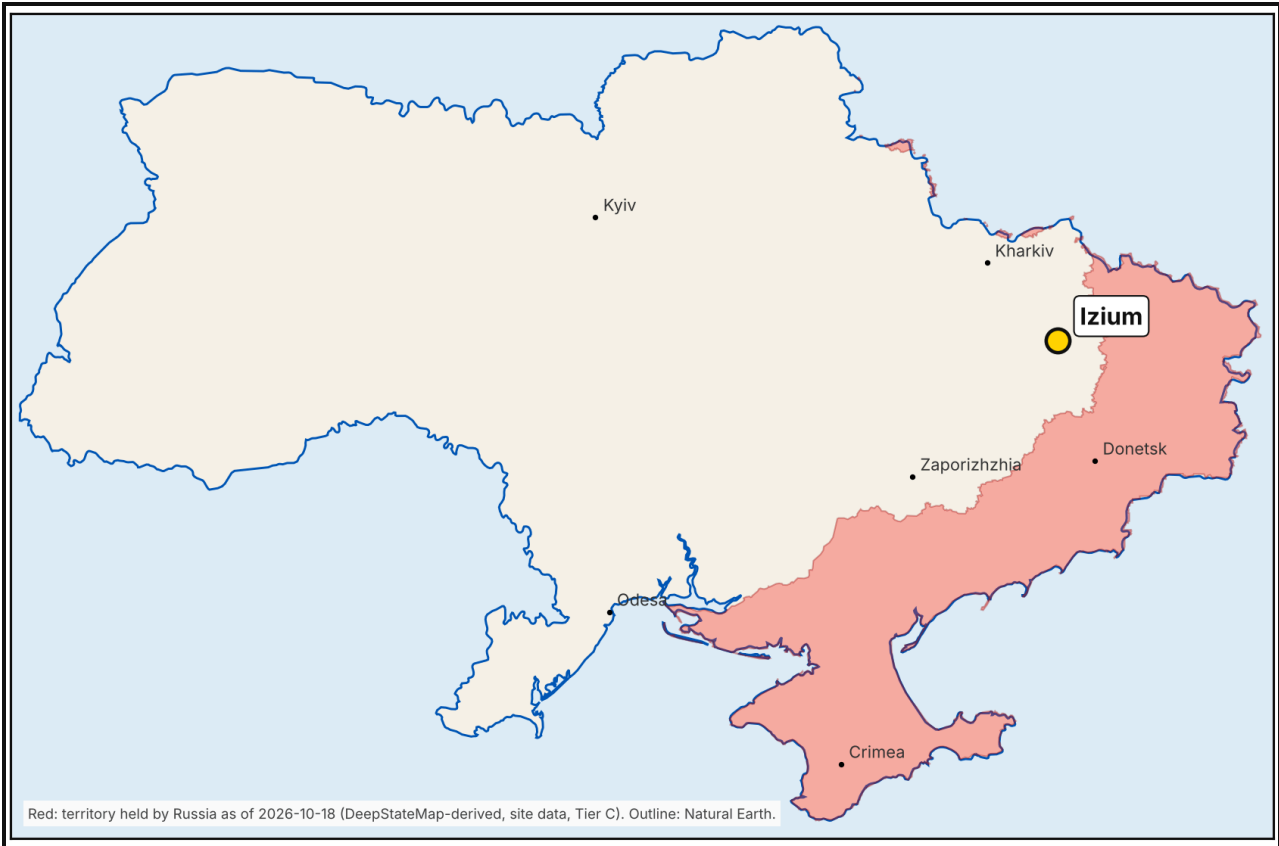
torture sites documented in the town; six found by police within a week of liberation C

AP, 2 Oct 2022; National Police, 16 Sep 2022

44+

civilians killed in one air strike on an apartment block at 2 Pershotravneva St, 9 Mar 2022 C

Human Rights Watch, 22 Mar 2023 (Ombudsman: 54)



BOTTOM LINE

A mass burial under occupation. Satellite analysis shows about 55,000 m² of ground excavated at the cemetery between April and July 2022, with a Russian artillery position beside it (Yale HRL; Maxar). The dead were buried in numbered graves, some holding two to four bodies, by a town under Russian control for six months.

Torture as a system. Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 100 people and found seven detention facilities; AP documented ten. OHCHR recorded the shooting of a 70-year-old morgue forensic expert, the killing of a woman last seen entering a Russian base, and the disappearance and electrocution of a community head (reports of Mar and Jun 2023).

Named and tried. By 2026 Ukraine had charged servicemen of the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, including its commander, and militants of the 'LNR' 204th Regiment; on 1 Jul 2026 a Kharkiv court sentenced one brigade serviceman to life and two militants to 15 years, in absentia.

LEGAL QUALIFICATION IN THREE LAYERS

KILLINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES OF CIVILIANS — ESTABLISHED IN PART (OHCHR, INDIVIDUAL CASES)

TORTURE SITES AND MASS GRAVES UNDER OCCUPATION — PATTERN (BUCHA, IZIUM, KHERSON)

SYSTEMATIC TORTURE AND MURDER, POLICY OF THE OCCUPYING FORCE — POSITION

Established. OHCHR has documented individual killings, a disappearance and torture in Iziium during the occupation (reports of 24 Mar and 27 Jun 2023, paras. 45–46, 54, 92); the Commission of Inquiry found Iziium among the most destroyed towns and announced it would examine the burial site (23 Sep 2022; A/HRC/52/62). No UN body has issued a finding on the burial site itself. **Pattern.** The Bucha sequence repeated: occupation, detention sites, mass burial, discovery after liberation, Russian denial as 'staged'. **Position.** Ukraine qualifies the killings and torture as war crimes (Art. 438 CCU) committed under a policy of the occupying force, and has charged a brigade commander with command responsibility.

WHAT WE ASK

Ask OHCHR and the Commission of Inquiry to complete and publish their work on the Iziium burial site, four years on. Designate the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade and Col. Safonov under national and EU regimes; only the army commander is listed, and not for Iziium. Support DNA identification and the families of the 447. Keep Iziium beside Bucha in every statement on the treatment of civilians under occupation.

SIX MONTHS OF OCCUPATION, ONE WEEK OF EXHUMATION

Izium was a town of 45,000 on the road from Kharkiv to the Donbas. Russia took it in March 2022 as the hub of its push on Sloviansk; it left on 10 September. The forest by the cemetery held what the occupation had done.

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28 Feb – 12 Mar 2022	Russian attacks on Izium; siege from 6 March; Ukrainian forces withdraw on 12 March. C — Open sources
9 Mar 2022	An air-dropped bomb destroys the apartment block at 2 Pershotravneva St with residents sheltering in the basement; at least 44 killed (HRW), 54 by the Ombudsman's count; no military use of the building found. C — Human Rights Watch, 22 Mar 2023
24 Mar 2022	A man from Kapytolivka is arrested at home; his body is later seen in the Izium morgue with three others bearing torture and gunshot wounds, and found in the collective grave after liberation. A — OHCHR, 27 Jun 2023, para. 92
1 Apr 2022	Ukraine's military confirms Russian control of the town. B — General Staff
6 Apr – 1 Jul 2022	About 55,000 m² excavated at the Pishchanske cemetery; a military excavator and a Russian artillery position visible in imagery. C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, 20 Sep 2022; Maxar
May 2022	Chechen 'Kadyrovtsy' shoot dead a 70-year-old forensic expert of the Izium morgue who refused to hand over his adapted vehicle. A — OHCHR, 24 Mar 2023, para. 45
2 Jun 2022	A 36-year-old woman is last seen entering a Russian base; her body, with a gunshot wound, is delivered to the morgue the same day. A — OHCHR, 24 Mar 2023, para. 46
18 Jun – Jul 2022	A community head is disappeared, beaten and electrocuted in a parking garage, released after 21 days, then re-detained at the former district police station. A — OHCHR, 27 Jun 2023, para. 54
10 Sep 2022	Izium liberated. B — General Staff
15–16 Sep 2022	Police find the forest burial site with more than 440 graves; exhumation begins — 17 soldiers and 22 civilians on the first day; six torture sites found in the town. B — National Police
16 Sep 2022	OHCHR announces a monitoring visit to Izium; the EU condemns the atrocities. A — OHCHR spokesperson; EEAS
19 Sep 2022	Kremlin spokesman Peskov: the Izium findings are a lie, the Bucha scenario repeated. RUSSIA SAYS — Moscow Times; EUvsDisinfo
23 Sep 2022	Commission of Inquiry chair Møse: the Commission intends to look into the Izium site. Regional governor: three more burial sites in the district. A — Col press conference; Kharkiv regional administration
24 Sep 2022	Exhumation complete: 447 bodies — 425 civilians including five children, 22 soldiers. B — Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office
29 Sep 2022	MFA spokesperson Zakharova: Ukraine is repeating the Bucha scenario in Izium — staged. RUSSIA SAYS — RIA Novosti via Ukrainska Pravda
2 Oct 2022	AP documents ten torture sites in the town; eight men confirmed killed under torture. C — AP
19 Oct 2022	Human Rights Watch: more than 100 interviews, 15 first-hand torture accounts, seven facilities; abuses part of a policy and plan. C — HRW
28 Nov 2022	DNA confirms grave No. 319 holds the writer Volodymyr Vakulenko, abducted in March 2022. B — Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office
15 Mar 2023	Commission of Inquiry: struck by the extent of destruction in Izium; also records likely Ukrainian use of cluster munitions in Russian-held Izium (paras. 27, 36–37). A — A/HRC/52/62
Nov 2023	Two 'LNR' militants of the 204th Regiment named as Vakulenko's killers. B — Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office
27 Oct 2025	Col. Sergey Safonov, commander of the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, charged in absentia with torture of a police officer in May 2022 (Art. 28(2), 438(1)). B — Prosecutor General; IWPR
24 Nov 2025	Reburial of the 449 identified dead, including 23 soldiers, completed. B — Izium city military administration
1 Jun 2026	Indictment of 13 — 'LNR' militants and collaborators — for abductions, detention in metal containers and the killing of a Plast member in March 2022. B — Prosecutor General
1 Jul 2026	Verdict in absentia for the killing of forensic expert Zdebskyi and entrepreneur Salyha: a 27th Brigade serviceman — life; two 'LNR' militants — 15 years each. B — Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office

THE BURIAL SITE

The site lay in the pine forest beside the Pishchanske municipal cemetery on Shakespeare Street. Satellite imagery shows about 55,000 m² of excavation between 6 April and 1 July 2022 and, 100 m away, a Russian artillery position on 8 April (Yale HRL, Maxar).

Exhumation ran from 16 to 23 September 2022 with about 200 specialists. Graves were numbered; some held two to four bodies; 22 soldiers were in a single pit. The prosecutor's count on 24 September: 447 bodies, 425 civilians including five children, 22 soldiers; at least 30 with signs of torture.

Identification took three years: 127 unnamed in February 2023, 46 in March 2025, none by November 2025, when 449 were reburied — the total rose by two as remains were separated. Most of the dead had been killed by shelling, by lack of medical care, or by execution; the apartment block of 9 March alone accounts for 44–54.



The burial site in the pine forest by the Pishchanske cemetery, Izium, 16 Sep 2022. Photo: Світлана Кирпан / АрміяInform · CC BY 4.0 · via Wikimedia Commons

THE TORTURE SITES

Police listed six sites within a week: the district administration, the police station, the SBU building, the prosecutor's office, the administrative services centre and the military commissariat (16 Sep 2022). AP counted ten, including a pit in a residential compound, a clinic garage by the railway and a kindergarten.

Human Rights Watch (19 Oct 2022): more than 100 interviews; 15 first-hand accounts of torture — beatings, electric shocks, mock executions — in seven facilities including two schools and the central police station; two released detainees took their own lives; the abuses were part of a policy and plan.

OHCHR's own cases from Izium: the morgue forensic expert shot by Chechen troops (May 2022); the woman killed after entering a Russian base (2 Jun 2022); the community head electrocuted in a garage (Jun–Jul 2022); the Kapytolivka man whose body passed through the morgue into the collective grave (Mar–May 2022).

Sources: A — OHCHR, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023 (24 Mar 2023), paras. 45–46, 74; OHCHR, Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (27 Jun 2023), paras. 54, 92; OHCHR spokesperson, 16 Sep 2022; Commission of Inquiry press conference 23 Sep 2022; A/77/533 (Oct 2022), para. 41; A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023), paras. 27, 36–37; A/78/540 (Oct 2023). B — National Police 16 Sep 2022; Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office 24 Sep 2022, 2 Oct 2022, 28 Nov 2022, 24 Feb 2023, 11 Mar 2025, 1 Jul 2026; Kharkiv regional administration 23 Sep 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General Nov 2023, 17 and 27 Oct 2025, 13 Mar and 1 Jun 2026; General Staff 2 May 2022; Izium city military administration 24 Nov 2025; Ombudsman (via HRW). C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab 20 Sep 2022; Maxar 17 Sep 2022; AP 2 Oct 2022; Human Rights Watch 19 Oct 2022 and 22 Mar 2023; Truth Hounds / Babel 12 Apr 2024; IWPR 18 Feb and 28 Nov 2025; Airwars RUK045; Moscow Times 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo; Veridica; Kyiv Post 16 Sep 2026; UK consolidated sanctions list (Kisel). All accessed 20 Oct 2026.



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WHERE THE UN RECORD STOPS, AND WHERE IT DOES NOT

The UN has documented individual killings and torture in Izium and announced work on the burial site, but has published no finding on the graves themselves. The count of the dead is Ukrainian; the pattern is confirmed by independent investigators; the gap is shown, not filled.

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OHCHR, report of 24 Mar 2023 (1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023), paras. 45–46: Chechen 'Kadyrovtsy' shot dead a 70-year-old forensic expert of the Izium morgue in May 2022; Russian forces killed a 36-year-old woman last seen entering their base on 2 Jun 2022; para. 74: the central hospital heavily damaged and converted into a military hospital. **A**

OHCHR, report on detention of civilians, 27 Jun 2023, paras. 54, 92: enforced disappearance, beating and electrocution of a community head in June–July 2022; a Kapytolivka man arrested 24 Mar 2022, his body seen in the morgue with torture and gunshot wounds, found in a collective grave near Izium after September 2022. **A**

Commission of Inquiry, 23 Sep 2022: intends to examine the Izium site. A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023): struck by the extent of destruction in Izium (para. 27); likely Ukrainian use of cluster munitions and scatterable mines in Russian-held Izium, three incidents, assessed as likely indiscriminate (paras. 36–37). A/77/533: Izium hospital among five damaged while operating. **A**

No OHCHR or Commission finding on the burial site has been published (checked: periodic reports to Oct 2024; A/78/540). The Commission's detailed paper A/HRC/52/CRP.4 could not be read for this draft. **A**

UKRAINIAN INVESTIGATION

Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office, 24 Sep 2022: 447 bodies — 425 civilians (five children), 22 soldiers; at least 30 with signs of torture; three further burial sites in the district (regional governor, 23 Sep). **B**

National Police, 16 Sep 2022: ten torture sites in the liberated part of the region, six in Izium. **B**

Identification: 127 unidentified (Feb 2023); 402 identified of 448 (Mar 2025); 449 identified and reburied, 23 soldiers (24 Nov 2025). **B**

Proceedings: 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade (1st Tank Army) — commander Col. Safonov and three servicemen charged (Oct 2025); one serviceman sentenced to life (1 Jul 2026). 'LNR' 204th Regiment — Vakulenko's killers named (Nov 2023); 13 indicted (Jun 2026); two militants sentenced to 15 years (Jul 2026). **B**

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS

Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, 20 Sep 2022: ~55,000 m² excavated at the cemetery 6 Apr – 1 Jul 2022; at least 40 military objects nearby. Maxar, 17 Sep 2022: imagery of March and August 2022; artillery position by the cemetery on 8 Apr. **C**

Human Rights Watch, 19 Oct 2022: torture in seven facilities, more than 100 interviews; 22 Mar 2023: the 9 March strike on 2 Pershotravneva St — at least 44 killed, no military use of the building, no reply from Russia's Defence Ministry. **C**

AP, 2 Oct 2022: ten torture sites, 15 survivors, eight men killed under torture. **C**

Truth Hounds, Apr 2024: Russian army units (488th Regiment, 856th Artillery Regiment) present at every stage of Vakulenko's abduction. **C**

THE NUMBERS — EVERY SOURCE, AS PUBLISHED

Figure	What it counts	Source · date · tier
436 · 447 · 448 · 449	bodies from the forest site — governor on 23 Sep 2022; prosecutor on 24 Sep 2022; police count used in 2025; city administration at reburial, Nov 2025 (remains separated during identification)	B
425 · 414	civilians within the 447 — prosecutor's office; investigators' breakdown (215 women, 194 men, 5 children, 11 undetermined)	B
21 · 22 · 23 · 25	soldiers — governor; prosecutor 2022; city 2025; prosecutor 2025	B
30+	bodies with signs of torture	Kharkiv regional prosecutor, Oct 2022 · B
44 · 51 · 54	killed at 2 Pershotravneva St, 9 Mar 2022 — HRW identified; bodies recovered; Ombudsman	C / B / B
6 · 7 · 10	torture sites in the town — police (Sep 2022); HRW; AP	B / C / C
1,000+	estimated deaths in Izium during the occupation — unattributed figure in Ukrainian media; not used	unverified



Graves with wooden crosses at the burial site, Dec 2022. Photo: Kharkiv Regional State Administration · CC BY 4.0 · via Wikimedia Commons

The hub shows OHCHR's individual cases as Tier A, the burial-site counts as 'according to Ukrainian authorities' (Tier B), and satellite and NGO work as Tier C. The absence of a UN finding on the graves is itself on the record — and is the first ask.

Sources: A — OHCHR, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023 (24 Mar 2023), paras. 45–46, 74; OHCHR, Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (27 Jun 2023), paras. 54, 92; OHCHR spokesperson, 16 Sep 2022; Commission of Inquiry press conference 23 Sep 2022; A/77/533 (Oct 2022), para. 41; A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023), paras. 27, 36–37; A/78/540 (Oct 2023). B — National Police 16 Sep 2022; Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office 24 Sep 2022, 2 Oct 2022, 28 Nov 2022, 24 Feb 2023, 11 Mar 2025, 1 Jul 2026; Kharkiv regional administration 23 Sep 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General Nov 2023, 17 and 27 Oct 2025, 13 Mar and 1 Jun 2026; General Staff 2 May 2022; Izium city military administration 24 Nov 2025; Ombudsman (via HRW). C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab 20 Sep 2022; Maxar 17 Sep 2022; AP 2 Oct 2022; Human Rights Watch 19 Oct 2022 and 22 Mar 2023; Truth Hounds / Babel 12 Apr 2024; IWPR 18 Feb and 28 Nov 2025; Airwars RUK045; Moscow Times 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo; Veridica; Kyiv Post 16 Sep 2026; UK consolidated sanctions list (Kisel). All accessed 20 Oct 2026.

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A TANK ARMY AND ITS PROXIES

Izium was held by the 1st Guards Tank Army and the 20th Army with 'LNR' mobilised regiments and Chechen units. Ukrainian proceedings now reach a brigade commander; the only Western sanction on the chain is the army commander's, imposed for the invasion as a whole.

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Who	Role in the case	Proceedings	Sanctions · courts
Col. Sergey Safonov commander, 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade (1st Guards Tank Army), Aug 2021 – Oct 2022	Command of the brigade whose servicemen tortured a police officer for nine days in a garage basement, May 2022	Charged in absentia 27 Oct 2025, Art. 28(2), 438(1) CCU; reported on wanted lists	No EU / US / UK / Canada listing found
Ahmed Duduyev combat-vehicle commander, 27th Brigade	Killings of forensic expert F. Zdebskyi and entrepreneur O. Salyha (May 2022); torture of a police officer	Life sentence in absentia, Kharkiv, 1 Jul 2026 (appeal pending); charged with torture Oct 2025	No listing found
Lt-Gen Sergey Kisel commander, 1st Guards Tank Army	Overall command of the formation in the Izium grouping	No Ukrainian charge found for Izium	UK, 15 Mar 2022 — for the invasion, not Izium
D. Konovnin, S. Reznik 'LNR' militants	Co-perpetrators in the Zdebskyi/Salyha killings	15 years each in absentia, 1 Jul 2026; prosecutors appealing for life	—
V. Neskorodyev, S. Udodenko 204th Rifle Regiment 'LNR', 2nd Army Corps	Killing of writer Volodymyr Vakulenko, Mar 2022, and three other killings	Suspicion in absentia, Nov 2023	—
13 militants and collaborators 204th Regiment 'LNR'; an 'LNR deputy'; a 'DNR' official	Abductions, detention in metal containers, killing of a Plast member (28 Mar 2022)	Indicted 1 Jun 2026, in absentia	—
Chechen 'Kadyrovtsy'	Shooting of the morgue forensic expert, May 2022	OHCHR finding (24 Mar 2023, para. 45); unit not identified	—

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Formations in the Izium grouping in spring 2022 (General Staff, 2 May 2022): elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army and 20th Army (Western Military District), the 35th Army and 68th Corps (Eastern District), airborne troops and the 5th Tank Brigade — up to 22 battalion tactical groups. Occupation administration: Vitaly Ganchev's Russian-installed 'Kharkiv region'.

Proceedings so far reach a brigade commander (Safonov) and name the 2nd Motor Rifle Division and the 252nd Regiment for other crimes in the town. The torture sites in state buildings — police, SBU, prosecutor's office, administration — point to the occupation's security apparatus rather than to passing units; no charge yet names its head.

The 9 March 2022 air strike on 2 Pershotravneva St, the single deadliest event, has no identified suspect; Russia's Defence Ministry did not answer Human Rights Watch.

THE RUSSIAN STATE'S OWN ACTS

Russia's installed 'head' of the region, Ganchev, said in September 2022 that the liberated towns 'must be cleansed' (RIA Novosti).

Three days before the site was found, the Russian outlet Vzglyad wrote that Ukraine was 'preparing a new provocation' in Izium — the denial was published before the discovery.

The Kremlin (19 Sep 2022) and the MFA (29 Sep 2022) called the exhumation a lie and a staged repeat of Bucha. Russia has opened no investigation.

Sanctions status from the UK consolidated list (Kisel) and aggregator data (Tier C); EU, US and Canadian lists not checked for Safonov, Duduyev or the 27th Brigade in this draft — to verify before release. Unit attributions for the forensic expert's killing differ: OHCHR says Chechen troops; the Ukrainian indictment names a 27th Brigade serviceman — shown as a contradiction, not reconciled.

Sources: A — OHCHR, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023 (24 Mar 2023), paras. 45–46, 74; OHCHR, Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (27 Jun 2023), paras. 54, 92; OHCHR spokesperson, 16 Sep 2022; Commission of Inquiry press conference 23 Sep 2022; A/77/533 (Oct 2022), para. 41; A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023), paras. 27, 36–37; A/78/540 (Oct 2023). B — National Police 16 Sep 2022; Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office 24 Sep 2022, 2 Oct 2022, 28 Nov 2022, 24 Feb 2023, 11 Mar 2025, 1 Jul 2026; Kharkiv regional administration 23 Sep 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General Nov 2023, 17 and 27 Oct 2025, 13 Mar and 1 Jun 2026; General Staff 2 May 2022; Izium city military administration 24 Nov 2025; Ombudsman (via HRW). C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab 20 Sep 2022; Maxar 17 Sep 2022; AP 2 Oct 2022; Human Rights Watch 19 Oct 2022 and 22 Mar 2023; Truth Hounds / Babel 12 Apr 2024; IWPR 18 Feb and 28 Nov 2025; Airwars RUK045; Moscow Times 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo; Veridica; Kyiv Post 16 Sep 2026; UK consolidated sanctions list (Kisel). All accessed 20 Oct 2026.

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A DENIAL WRITTEN BEFORE THE DISCOVERY

Russia's response to Izium was the Bucha response, word for word: a lie, a staging, a provocation. It was prepared in advance and has never been followed by an investigation, a counter-count or an explanation of who dug 55,000 square metres beside an artillery position.

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DMITRY PESKOV · KREMLIN SPOKESMAN · 19 SEP 2022

“It's a lie... the same scenario as the provocation in Bucha.”

Moscow Times, 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo

MARIA ZAKHAROVA · MFA SPOKESPERSON · 29 SEP 2022

“Trying its best to repeat the Bucha scenario in Izium — in a word, staged.”

RIA Novosti; Ukrainska Pravda, 29 Sep 2022

VZGLYAD (VZ.RU) · 12 SEP 2022, THREE DAYS BEFORE THE SITE WAS FOUND

“Ukraine is preparing a new act of provocation in Izium.”

Veridica, citing vz.ru

VITALY GANCHEV · RUSSIAN-INSTALLED 'HEAD' OF KHARKIV REGION · SEP 2022

“I believe these towns must be cleansed.”

RIA Novosti, via Veridica

THE GROUND WAS MOVED BEFORE LIBERATION

Satellite imagery shows about 55,000 m² excavated at the cemetery between 6 April and 1 July 2022, while the town was under Russian control, with a Russian artillery position 100 m away (Yale HRL, Maxar). The graves were numbered; the morgue records for one victim show burial on 12 May 2022 (OHCHR, para. 92). A staging would have needed six months and the occupier's cooperation.

What the claim concedes: That the graves exist — the dispute is about who filled them.

THE BUCHA SCENARIO IS A RUSSIAN LINE RUSSIA HAS DROPPED

By 2026 Russia's own publications on Bucha no longer claimed staging (see "Heirs of Goebbels" — the 2026 Bucha denial). In Izium the UN itself documented killings during the occupation — a morgue worker shot by Chechen troops, a woman killed at a Russian base, a man tortured and buried in May 2022 (OHCHR, 2023). None of these is a staging.

What the claim concedes: That the two cases are alike — which is the pattern.

PRE-EMPTIVE

The denial was published on 12 September; police found the site on 15 September and began exhuming on the 16th. A story prepared before the discovery describes knowledge of what would be found, not an assessment of it.

What the claim concedes: Foreknowledge that something would be found.

THE OCCUPATION'S OWN VOCABULARY

Said of the liberated towns after the discovery. Human Rights Watch found the torture in Izium to be part of a policy and plan; OHCHR's cases involve the occupation's bases and buildings. The statement describes the method.

What the claim concedes: Intent toward the population of the towns.

FAIR TO SAY

No UN body has issued a finding on the burial site; the counts of 447–449 are Ukrainian, and the prosecutors' own sub-totals do not always add up (a March 2025 breakdown sums to 441 against a stated 402 identified). The hub shows the figures as published.

The Commission of Inquiry also found that Ukrainian forces likely used cluster munitions and scatterable mines in Russian-held Izium in three incidents (A/HRC/52/62, paras. 36–37); the record shows harm on both sides where the UN records it.

Attributions of individual killings differ between OHCHR and Ukrainian investigators (the forensic expert: Chechen troops or a 27th Brigade serviceman); the verdict of 1 Jul 2026 is in absentia and under appeal.

Sources: A — OHCHR, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023 (24 Mar 2023), paras. 45–46, 74; OHCHR, Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (27 Jun 2023), paras. 54, 92; OHCHR spokesperson, 16 Sep 2022; Commission of Inquiry press conference 23 Sep 2022; A/77/533 (Oct 2022), para. 41; A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023), paras. 27, 36–37; A/78/540 (Oct 2023). B — National Police 16 Sep 2022; Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office 24 Sep 2022, 2 Oct 2022, 28 Nov 2022, 24 Feb 2023, 11 Mar 2025, 1 Jul 2026; Kharkiv regional administration 23 Sep 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General Nov 2023, 17 and 27 Oct 2025, 13 Mar and 1 Jun 2026; General Staff 2 May 2022; Izium city military administration 24 Nov 2025; Ombudsman (via HRW). C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab 20 Sep 2022; Maxar 17 Sep 2022; AP 2 Oct 2022; Human Rights Watch 19 Oct 2022 and 22 Mar 2023; Truth Hounds / Babel 12 Apr 2024; IWPR 18 Feb and 28 Nov 2025; Airwars RUK045; Moscow Times 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo; Veridica; Kyiv Post 16 Sep 2026; UK consolidated sanctions list (Kisel). All accessed 20 Oct 2026.



AN OCCUPYING POWER ANSWERS FOR ITS DEAD

Under occupation the protecting power is the occupier: it must treat civilians humanely, account for deaths, allow the ICRC and record burials. Iziium's record is of killings, torture sites in state buildings and a forest of numbered graves — and of a UN finding on the site that is still owed.

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ESTABLISHED — BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

OHCHR (24 Mar 2023, paras. 45–46): the shooting of the morgue forensic expert by Chechen troops; the killing of a woman last seen entering a Russian base. OHCHR (27 Jun 2023, paras. 54, 92): enforced disappearance and torture of a community head; a man tortured, killed and buried in the collective grave.

Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/52/62): the extent of destruction in Iziium; intention stated on 23 Sep 2022 to examine the burial site; also, likely Ukrainian use of cluster munitions in the Russian-held town.

No UN finding on the burial site; the Commission's detailed paper (A/HRC/52/CRP.4) not read for this draft.

PATTERN — WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

Occupation → detention sites in police and administration buildings → mass burial → discovery on liberation: Bucha and the Kyiv region (Apr 2022), Iziium and the Kharkiv region (Sep 2022), Kherson (Nov 2022) — the Commission of Inquiry has found torture in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions to be widespread and systematic (A/78/540).

The denial sequence — lie, staged, Bucha-style provocation — issued before or within days of discovery, never followed by an investigation.

Air strikes on apartment blocks with sheltering residents: Iziium 9 Mar 2022 (44–54), Borodianka, Mariupol; no suspect for any of them.

POSITION — UKRAINE'S QUALIFICATION

Ukraine qualifies the killings and torture in Iziium as war crimes (Art. 438 CCU), committed as a policy of the occupying force, and has charged the 27th Brigade's commander with responsibility for his subordinates' torture (Art. 28(2)).

Ukraine treats the forest burial as a mass grave of victims of the occupation, including of executions; the proportion killed by execution, shelling and neglect is for the courts and, Ukraine asks, for the Commission of Inquiry to establish.

THE RULES THAT APPLY

Geneva Convention IV arts. 27, 31–32 (humane treatment, no coercion or torture), 49 (no deportation), 130 (burials recorded and graves marked); Hague Regulations art. 43 (the occupier's duty to maintain public order and civil life).

Rome Statute art. 8(2)(a)(i)–(ii) wilful killing and torture; art. 7(1)(a), (f), (i) murder, torture and enforced disappearance as crimes against humanity where part of a policy; art. 28 command responsibility.

Additional Protocol I arts. 51, 57 for the strike of 9 Mar 2022: no military use of the building found.

WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

How the 447 died, by category: executed, killed by shelling, died of neglect — the courts and the Commission have not published a breakdown.

Who ordered the torture sites in the state buildings; the occupation's security chain is unnamed in proceedings.

A suspect for the 9 March 2022 strike on 2 Pershotravneva St; any Russian investigation.

The three further burial sites announced in the district in September 2022; no follow-up figures found.

Western sanctions status of Safonov, Duduyev and the 27th Brigade — not checked against primary lists.

WHAT WE ASK

- Ask the UN to finish Iziium.** Request OHCHR and the Commission of Inquiry to publish their work on the Iziium burial site, announced in September 2022 — the only large mass grave of the war without a UN finding.
- Sanction the brigade.** Designate the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, Col. Safonov and the servicemen charged in Iziium under national and EU regimes; the only listing in the chain is the army commander's, for the invasion as a whole.
- Support identification.** DNA laboratories and support for the families of the 449; the count was closed only in November 2025.
- Name the pattern.** Iziium with Bucha and Kherson in every statement on occupation: detention sites, mass burial, denial — three towns, one method.

Sources: A — OHCHR, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 Aug 2022 – 31 Jan 2023 (24 Mar 2023), paras. 45–46, 74; OHCHR, Detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine (27 Jun 2023), paras. 54, 92; OHCHR spokesperson, 16 Sep 2022; Commission of Inquiry press conference 23 Sep 2022; A/77/533 (Oct 2022), para. 41; A/HRC/52/62 (15 Mar 2023), paras. 27, 36–37; A/78/540 (Oct 2023). B — National Police 16 Sep 2022; Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office 24 Sep 2022, 2 Oct 2022, 28 Nov 2022, 24 Feb 2023, 11 Mar 2025, 1 Jul 2026; Kharkiv regional administration 23 Sep 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General Nov 2023, 17 and 27 Oct 2025, 13 Mar and 1 Jun 2026; General Staff 2 May 2022; Iziium city military administration 24 Nov 2025; Ombudsman (via HRW). C — Yale Humanitarian Research Lab 20 Sep 2022; Maxar 17 Sep 2022; AP 2 Oct 2022; Human Rights Watch 19 Oct 2022 and 22 Mar 2023; Truth Hounds / Babel 12 Apr 2024; IWPR 18 Feb and 28 Nov 2025; Airwars RUK045; Moscow Times 19 Sep 2022; EUvsDisinfo; Veridica; Kyiv Post 16 Sep 2026; UK consolidated sanctions list (Kisel). All accessed 20 Oct 2026.



IZIUM: 447 GRAVES IN A FOREST

8 photographs from official sources, as shown on the live page. Each image is credited and openly licensed; videos are linked to the official post (scan the code). No image shows the dead; graphic aftermath is blurred in print. The downloadable pack on the live page holds the full-size files and their SHA-256.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026



The burial site in the pine forest by the Pishchanske cemetery, Iziium, 16 Sep 2022

Світлана Кирган / АрміяInform · 2022-09-16 · CC BY 4.0
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_\(23\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_(23).jpg)



Graves with wooden crosses at the burial site, Dec 2022

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_\(2022-12-09\)_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_(2022-12-09)_01.jpg)



A numbered wooden cross at the burial site

Kharkiv Regional State Administration · 2022-12-09 · CC BY 4.0
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_\(2022-12-09\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_(2022-12-09)_02.jpg)



Exhumation under way at the burial site, 16 Sep 2022

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_\(29\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_(29).jpg)



DNA laboratory set up in Iziium to identify the dead, 21 Dec 2022

Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine · 2022-12-21 · CC BY 4.0
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DNA_laboratory_in_Izium,_2022-12-21_\(01\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DNA_laboratory_in_Izium,_2022-12-21_(01).jpg)



The apartment block at 2 Pershotravneva St, struck on 9 Mar 2022

Kharkiv Regional State Administration · 2022-12-09 · CC BY 4.0
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2_Pershotravneva_Street,_Izium_\(2022-12-09\)_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2_Pershotravneva_Street,_Izium_(2022-12-09)_01.jpg)



2 Pershotravneva St: the collapsed section of the building

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2_Pershotravneva_Street,_Izium_\(2022-12-09\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2_Pershotravneva_Street,_Izium_(2022-12-09)_02.jpg)



Body bags at the exhumation site — graphic aftermath, blurred

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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_\(20\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cemetery_in_Izium_made_during_Russian_occupation_(20).jpg)

