

DIGNITY PUBLICATION SERIES ON TORTURE AND ORGANISED VIOLENCE  
REPORT

#42

# “NINE CIRCLES OF HELL”:

PLACES OF DETENTION IN UKRAINE UNDER THE  
RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

MARCH 2022 – DECEMBER 2022

Vadym Chovgan  
Mykhailo Romanov  
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#### **REPORT**

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**The authors would like to express gratitude to colleagues who contributed to this report but prefer to remain anonymous.**

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The title of this report 'Nine circles of hell' is inspired by an interview with a torture survivor who was imprisoned in Pivnichna (meaning 'Northern') Colony no. 90 in Kherson region. The survivor could no longer bear torture and asked to be killed. The torturer first cleared the murder with his command, but then, referring to Dante's *Inferno* as an allegory, said 'Wait! It's too early. You haven't gone through all seven (sic!) circles of hell yet!' The torturer apparently meant 'nine circles of hell'.

*March 2023*

We would like to acknowledge the generous funding provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the French Foundation (La Fondation de France) for the work leading to the publication of this report.



**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF DENMARK**



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# 1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a constant flow of images and accounts has painted a horrifying picture of the human rights violations and international crimes that appear to be strategies of Russia's war. At the same time, relatively little information has emerged from those areas of Ukraine in which Russia has situated itself as an occupying power. This report fills this gap by presenting the findings of the monitoring and documentation of human rights and other violations of international law committed in places of detention in the non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine (the NGCA<sup>1</sup>) between March and December 2022.

The report covers a wide range of places of detention, notably penitentiary institutions (correctional colonies<sup>2</sup> and pre-trial detention centers), police establishments and social and healthcare institutions. In addition, it covers unofficial places of detention such as makeshift torture chambers. Within these places of detention, the report documents numerous violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, wilful killings and military strikes. Building on 725 documented episodes, the report outlines key patterns and trends.

This report is based on information and evidence of violations of international law gathered from 121 interviews with victims and witnesses who experienced Russian custody (conducted by us (64) and third parties (57)) as well as open-source intelligence.

The collected data had been subject to verification and corroboration, so as to ensure its veracity. Only findings that meet the 'reasonable grounds to believe' standard have been included in the present report.

The findings presented in this report have been produced collaboratively by DIGNITY: Danish Institute against Torture (DIGNITY), European Prison Litigation Network (EPLN), Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (KHHPG), Ukraine without Torture (UwT), and Protection of Prisoners of Ukraine (PPU).

## Key findings

### A) PLACES OF DETENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR

#### Penitentiary institutions

The initial rapid advance of Russian armed forces into Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the 24 February 2022 invasion meant that 11 prisons in the South and East of Ukraine (Mykolaiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions) collectively holding 3103 prisoners were not evacuated, rendering the prison staff and prisoners under Russian occupation. During these initial stages, Ukrainian authorities had not issued clear guidance as to how prison staff and prisoners were to respond to the invasion and the occupation, especially in case of shelling by the Russian armed forces. Later, during the spring and summer of 2022, the Ukrainian authorities evacuated at least 13 prisons close to the areas where active hostilities took place.

According to international humanitarian law, the Russian Federation became responsible for the treatment of prisoners and conditions in places of detention as part of the civilian population under their control, including for ensuring basic necessities.<sup>3</sup> However, the humanitarian situation in places of detention in the NGCA rapidly deteriorated as regular supplies from Ukraine were interrupted, and no proper substitution was offered by the new Russian administrators overseeing these places. Consequently, due to the shortage of supplies and the use of some prisons as military bases, prisoners were first transferred to and concentrated in a few prisons in Kherson region, and then transferred without their consent to other prisons in the NGCA or in Russia. Such transfers without the affected persons' consent and followed by a concealment of their fate or whereabouts constitute enforced disappearances and violate international law.<sup>4</sup>

From the moment of gaining control of Ukrainian prisons, Russian servicemen and former Ukrainian prison staff who agreed to collaborate with the Russian occupying forces committed human rights violations and international

1 For ease of reading, the term 'NGCA' used in this document refers to territories occupied by Russian forces after 24 February 2022. Where reference is made to the NGCA as a whole, i.e. including Crimea and those parts of the Donbass that were occupied by Russia prior to February 2022, this is stated explicitly.

2 In this report, the terms 'colony' and 'correctional colony' are used interchangeably and mean regular prisons where prisoners serve their sentence of deprivation of liberty. The key feature of colonies is collective accommodation of prisoners in dorms instead of individual detention in cells.

3 See, e.g., Section I of the Fourth Geneva Convention (Relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war) of 12 August 1949.

4 The definition of enforced disappearances can be found in Art. 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (2010) and the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (1992). Such transfers to the territory of the Russian Federation violate international humanitarian law: Articles 49 and 76 of Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, 1949; this is a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions (see Article 85 (4) (a) of Additional Protocol I) and a war crime under the ICC Rome statute (Article 7 (1)(i), Article 8 (2) (b) (viii)).

crimes in relation to the prisoners. These violations included wilful killings, torture other ill-treatment, and threats thereof, forced labour, including for military purposes, forced imposition of Russian citizenship, and forced participation in the illegal referenda on Russia's annexation of the occupied Ukrainian territories. These and other violations are described in detail in this report emphasising individual survivors' experiences in the form of their direct testimonies.

Prisoners remained in prisons in the NGCAs, even when they were located in areas of active hostilities or used as Russian military bases. Moreover, in some cases Russian artillery systems were placed next to places of detention, effectively turning them, and in particular the prisoners inside them, into shields. Consequently, many prisons were targeted and damaged by artillery strikes resulting in injuries and death of prison staff and prisoners.

### **Police establishments**

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, at least 100 police establishments ended up under Russian occupation following the invasion on 24 February 2022. The Russian military and the occupation police in the NGCA used police establishments as offices, accommodation, and detention centers. The occupation police comprised Russians and Ukrainians who agreed to serve for Russia.

Russian servicemen used police stations to establish its occupation regime by detaining local citizens and torturing them soon after the occupation. The primary targets were former Ukrainian civil servants, including teachers and community leaders, former and retired Ukrainian soldiers or policemen, and ordinary civilians, including children, known for patriotic sentiments or suspected of any support of the Ukrainian state. The fact that the Russian occupying forces targeted these groups tends to show an intention to punish and intimidate those seen as threatening to Russia's sustained rule of the area.

Nearly ubiquitously, torture chambers were established in the basements of police stations. The official cells of police stations and temporary detention facilities ('ITT')<sup>5</sup> were also used to detain and torture civilians. Such torture chambers and cells were mostly discovered upon liberation of parts of NGCA by the Ukrainian armed forces.

### **Social and health care institutions**

Soon after the occupation began, administrations in social and health care institutions (psychiatric hospitals, institutions for children and elderly) began to struggle to maintain regular operations due to staff shortages and interruptions in supplies of basic necessities such as water, food and medicine. In such conditions, the administrations grappled with protecting detainees from military strikes, and ensuring basic needs and minimally acceptable detention conditions. These institutions had to rely heavily on local volunteers' support and resources of their individual staff members.

Because of the issues with substituting regular supplies and ongoing hostilities, and like detainees in penitentiary institutions, many persons detained in social institutions were transferred to other places in the NGCA and in Russia, reportedly without their consent.

Currently, there is no consolidated reliable data on the number of such institutions that ended up under the Russian occupation in the NGCAs of Ukraine. However, the number of persons who remained in such institutions are likely to be many. For example, as of March 2022, about 6000 persons remained in at least 42 Ukrainian social institutions in the NGCA and, therefore, were cut-off from support and supplies. As of 25 March 2022, the largest number of such institutions was in Kherson region – at least 10.

## **B) IDENTIFIED VIOLATIONS**

### **Torture and other ill-treatment**

Our findings are based on 152 documented instances of torture and other ill-treatment in places of detention. According to the reports, the Russian military and other officials used torture in places of detention as a tool to support and solidify their occupation regime. The main purposes of torture were to intimidate the civilian population, including detainees and, to ensure a more effective control of NGCA in general and of places of detention in particular. Other related purposes of torture were to obtain information and to punish civilians for their pro-Ukrainian patriotic position or for any ties with people holding such a position, especially with the Ukrainian armed forces.

As regards official places of detention, torture and other ill-treatment quickly became an instrument to extract confessions from prisoners, to intimidate and coerce them to obey the newly established Russian administration.

5 Temporary detention facilities (Ukrainian: "Izoliatory tymchasovoho trymannia" (ITT)) are police facilities designed for a short-term detention (up to 10 days) of suspects prior to placement in pre-trial detention centers. The ITTs are also used for detention on other purposes such as serving the administrative penalty of detention.

Torture was used from the very moment of gaining control over prisons to install the atmosphere of fear and obedience among prisoners. For example, first prisoners who were tortured were those who openly supported the prison subculture and were thus considered informal prisoner leaders. Prisoners were also subjected to torture, other ill-treatment and threats thereof to coerce them to accept the Russian citizenship, to participate in the sham referenda and to force them to work for various military purposes, such as digging trenches and producing fortifications.

In addition, torture was applied to civilians in the so-called 'filtration camps' – unofficial places of detention used to 'filter' civilians to identify those who may pose even the smallest threat to the occupation regime.

The methods of torture included both physical and psychological torture (see box 1). It needs to be noted that this list is not exhaustive, but merely reflects the most common used torture methods. The types of torture used, varied depending on the places where the torture was inflicted, on the availability of specific instruments, as well as on the personalities of the perpetrators – hence the variety of methods.

### **Box 1: Documented methods of torture and other ill-treatment**

#### **Physical**

- Beatings, kicks, punches, slaps and blows
- Electric shocks, including through connecting wires to genitalia
- Positional torture
- Suffocation (gas mask, bag over head)
- Inhumane detention conditions
- Deprivation (of moving space, light, fresh air, food, water, sleep, sanitary facilities, medication)
- Excessively tight handcuffing

#### **Psychological**

- Mock executions, shootings close to parts of the body
- Subjecting to sounds of explosions and shootings
- Threats of execution and/or inflicting psychological disabilities, including directed at close relatives
- Humiliation

Establishing improvised torture chambers was one of the first administrative decisions of the Russian occupying power, followed closely thereafter by stamping out any opposition to their rule. Such places were, in many instances, found upon liberation of occupied cities, towns and even some villages. Our findings suggest that establishing torture chambers and torturing people in them was a routine practice in all places occupied by the Russian forces. The detention places were mostly basements of individual houses and official institutions (e.g. police stations, schools, hospitals, railway stations). They also included other places such as garages, factories, agricultural compounds, or other premises. Torture and other ill-treatment in unofficial places of detention were often accompanied by other human rights violations such as unlawful detention and extrajudicial executions.

Further, out of 64 prisoners from prisons in the NGCAs that we directly interviewed, 55 claimed that Russian's occupying authorities used torture and other ill-treatment in their institutions. The testimonies came from 7 prisons in the NGCAs and they contain credible claims about torture and other ill-treatment in all of them.

Given the ubiquity of torture and other ill-treatment in official and unofficial places of detention, its broad geographic spread, the commonality across occupied regions and places of detention in terms of methods and targeted victims, torture and other ill-treatment could be considered widespread and systematic.



### Inadequate conditions of detention

Conditions in the official places of detention in the NGCA worsened rapidly after the occupation with regular supply of water, electricity and heating interrupted. Supply chains of food, medicine and other necessities were severed. In addition, many staff members of the places of detention – sometimes up to 80 % – left their service for various reasons such as evacuation or unwillingness to collaborate with the occupying authorities. Ensuring decent detention conditions became impossible as the administrations ran out of essential human and material resources.

During the initial periods of the occupation, places of detention in the NGCA continued to rely on their stocks of food, medication, and other necessities. Later, it appeared that the Russian occupying forces did not plan for a continuity of these supplies. The administrations of places of detention had to operate relying on volunteers and other alternatives such as requesting other state institutions to share their stocks (e.g. medication from local hospitals). The absence of plans to establish new supply chains by the Russian occupying authorities might have been the reason for transferring prisoners and other detainees to the territory of Russia, where such supplies could be more reliably ensured.

As regards unofficial places of detention, they are unlawful, and by definition unsuitable for detaining people as they were not designed for this purpose. Such unofficial locations on the NGCAs featured extremely poor detention conditions in such places, including lack of food and potable water, absence of toilets, deprivation of fresh air, natural and/or artificial light. In many instances, such conditions were combined with physical ill-treatment and could amount to torture.

### Killings

There have been numerous reports of killings by Russian servicemen in unofficial places of detention. For example, in its recent report, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 30 cases of executions of civilians in detention. According to a December 2022 thematic OHCHR report<sup>6</sup>, civilians were detained in houses, basements, garages, a post office, agricultural compounds, or other premises occupied by Russian troops. Bodies were found in makeshift detention facilities, and, in most cases, with cuffed or duct-taped hands and injuries such as gunshot wounds in extremities or groin area, stab wounds, and mutilated limbs, suggesting the victims were tortured before being killed.<sup>7</sup> The findings of this report corroborate these trends and also suggest that unofficial detention was often a precursor to torture and killings of civilians.

As regards official places of detention, reports of killings have been less frequent than other types of violations such as torture. Nevertheless, Russian servicemen reportedly killed prisoners under false pretences of suppressing riots, but in reality the killings were allegedly in furtherance of an effort to establish the 'new internal order' based on fear. In addition, official places of detention, such as police stations, were reportedly also used to torture and execute civilians.

The cases of killings were mostly detected by the Ukrainian law enforcement authorities upon liberation of parts of the NGCA. Many such reports were public and were used in this report to demonstrate the patterns in the conduct of the Russian armed forces. In addition, the findings in this report substantiated by the information received from closed sources, notably from interviews with (ex-)prisoners.

### Military strikes

In the period covered by this report, many cases of shelling and damage to the premises of places of detention were recorded. This section discussing these strikes covers not only incidents in the NGCA, but also in the GCA as this allows demonstrating how the context of war directly impacted places of detention in all of Ukraine. Such incidents consisted mostly of artillery shelling of colonies, pre-trial detention facilities and social institutions. The shelling resulted in the destruction of these places, damage to facility infrastructure, injuries and sometimes death of prison staff, prisoners, staff of social institutions and their residents.

According to Ukraine's Ministry of Justice, at least 22 prisons were damaged, causing the death of 5 prison staff and injuries of another 5 prison staff. At least 1 detainee was killed. However, these numbers do not reflect the casualties in prison in the NGCA, which are difficult – or even impossible – to fully record. For example, reportedly at least 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war were killed by an explosion in Olenivka Colony in Donetsk region, which could not be verified as Russia refused to grant access to this prison for a specially established UN mission. Shelling of places of detention took place even during evacuation. For example, at least 4 medical workers were killed, and 2 patients were injured during evacuation of a psychiatric hospital in the village of Strilecha, Kharkiv region.

6 OHCHR Report *Killings of Civilians: Summary Executions and Attacks on Individual Civilians in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions in the context of the Russian Federation's Armed Attack against Ukraine*, December 2022: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-07-OHCHR-Thematic-Report-Killings-FN.pdf>

7 Ibid.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Ukrainian authorities lost effective control over all official state institutions across those territories in the east and south of Ukraine that came under Russian occupation. These institutions included places of detention such as prisons (11), police establishments (at least 100), and certain social institutions such as psychiatric hospitals. Moreover, Russia asserted and maintained its occupation by establishing an extensive network of unofficial places of detention in every occupied city and town, and in some villages.

Even in times of peace, places of detention are tightly guarded institutions running high risks of human rights violations for their occupants. It is exactly for these reasons that international human rights treaties oblige States to ensure such places are persistently monitored by external and independent expert bodies. However, no such bodies exist, nor could they function, under the Russian occupation in Ukraine. Places of detention have become completely closed for any type of external visits and oversight, stranding detainees under the unmitigated power of the Russian armed forces.

Adding to the 'conventional' risks to detainees in places of detention are the inherent dangers of being held in an active war zone. Specifically, detainees in the occupied territories of Ukraine face additional risks from warfare, including shelling by artillery, lack of water, heating and electricity, lack of food and other vital necessities.

In response to these increased risks of human rights violations and international crimes, our organizations<sup>8</sup> carried out continuous monitoring of places of detention in the occupied territories of Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion. Given the lack of direct access to such places, we adopted supplemental methods of observation and review, such as indirect monitoring. These methods are applied remotely and include collecting and verifying open-source information, interviewing former prisoners and other witnesses, maintaining contacts with detainees, their relatives, and employees of places of detention. Due to the extreme risk of reprisals against detainees in prisons still under Russian control, our team limited its contacts with this category of detainees and, instead, focused on post-factum interviews with them upon release.

This report is the first in a series on treatment of prisoners and conditions in places of detention in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia. The main purpose of our monitoring efforts is to systematically identify, analyse and document the types, magnitude and patterns of gross human rights violations and international crimes committed in official and unofficial places of detention in these territories.

In terms of scope, the report is limited to the thematic areas of expertise of the authoring organizations: torture and other human rights violations in places of detention. In addition, we focused on the general impact of war on places of detention, their staff, and detainees. Personal accounts and direct speech of victims and witnesses are used in this report to describe in detail how the occupation unfolded and was experienced through the eyes of detainees.

We hope that this report will help to document and disclose the nature of the human rights violations and international crimes taking place under the Russian occupation and hereby help advance accountability efforts. While it is primarily a human rights monitoring report, much of the information collected may be indicative of violations of international humanitarian law and international criminal law, with indications of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Although we anonymized parts of the information provided in this report for the reasons of personal data protection and security, our organizations can share additional details with accountability bodies and actors engaged in pursuing accountability of those responsible, depending on the purpose and nature of the request. For any related inquiries, please contact us at: [info@dignity.dk](mailto:info@dignity.dk)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This report is based primarily on the following methods of gathering, preserving, and analysing information:

- Conducting interviews and maintaining written correspondence with victims and witnesses.
- Collecting information from open sources, including social media platforms and websites.
- Using other sources of information such as communication with prison authorities, administrations of places of detention, detainees' relatives, and prison staff.
- Verifying the above sources as to their authenticity and reliability.

Preserving and analysing the gathered information in a secure database tailormade with the support of HURIDOCS.<sup>9</sup>

The present report is based on information obtained via 121 interviews, conducted either directly by the report's contributors (64) or taken from the videos and/or transcripts of interviews published for open access by third parties, including by journalists and other human rights organisations (57).

To conduct interviews with victims and witnesses who had stayed in the NGCA, we met with former prisoners detained in these territories who had moved to the GCA upon their release from the NGCA or from Russia (following their transfer there from the NGCA). We also interviewed prisoners during our visits to prisons in the GCA, notably those who were evacuated from Kherson region upon its liberation.

As regards open source information, we recorded and used 659 items containing allegations of various human rights violations and/or international crimes.

Findings are included in this report, provided they meet the 'reasonable grounds to believe' standard, where, based on a body of available information, an ordinarily prudent observer would have reasonable grounds to believe that an event took place as described.

## 4. PLACES OF DETENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR

The occupation's impacts on places of detention differed depending on type of place of detention. Prisons, with their developed infrastructure and 'stable' population, were used for various military purposes. For example, Russian armed forces used prison property to store ammunition and military vehicles, used living premises for own accommodation, and used prisoners for labour purposes (e.g. for digging trenches). Torture and ill-treatment were imposed to demand obedience and non-resistance to the new administration from prisoners. In turn, police stations were relied on for short-term detention, to interrogate and intimidate the local population, especially those who manifested a patriotic position or had ties with Ukrainian soldiers. As regards social institutions, these were particularly impacted by the poor humanitarian situation, especially by the lack of food and medication.

Below are details of specific contexts in each type of these institutions.

### A. PENITENTIARY INSTITUTIONS

After 24 February 2022, Ukraine lost control over 11 penitentiary institutions (3 pre-trial detention centers and 8 colonies), which were or remain to be located in the NGCA.

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<sup>9</sup> HURIDOCS (Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems) is an NGO that helps human rights groups gather, organise and use information related to human rights protection. The authors of this report are grateful for the important support that HURIDOCS has provided to our organisations.

### As of 1 March 2022

- Mariupol Pre-Trial Detention Center, Donetsk region - 349 persons
- Pryazovska Colony no. 107, Zaporizhzhia region - 99 persons
- Starobilsk Pre-Trial Detention Center, Luhansk region - 332 persons

### As of 1 May 2022

Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center, Kherson region - 286 persons

- Holoprystanska Colony no. 7, Kherson region - 231 persons
- Dariivska Colony no. 10, Kherson region - 704 persons
- Pivnichna Colony no. 90, Kherson region - 838 persons
- Snihurivska Colony no. 5, Mykolaiv region - 98 persons
- Veselivskiy Correctional Center no. 8, Zaporizhzhia region - 79 persons
- Prymorska Colony no. 145, Zaporizhzhia region - 21 persons

### As of 1 June 2022

- Melitopolska Penitentiary Institution no. 144, Zaporizhzhia region - 64 persons

According to the official data received from the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, a total of 3101 were held in such prisons<sup>10</sup>. Until 24 February 2022, 28 prisons in the NGCA were occupied during the previous stages of war (i.e. since 2014), amounting to around 15000 detained persons.

### Evacuation

For a long time after 24 February 2022, the possibility of evacuation was not clear for detainees and employees of penitentiary institutions. The Ministry of Justice of Ukraine published its first official comment on the evacuation only on 31 August - six months after the full-scale invasion. The Ministry of Justice noted that:

- The evacuation of convicts and persons taken into custody from areas close to the areas of hostilities is carried out to the appropriate institutions for pre-trial detention and execution of punishment, which are in a safe area. The decision to conduct such an evacuation, as well as the notification of its beginning, is the authority of the relevant military commands together with military administrations.<sup>11</sup>

Regardless of detailed legislation on the procedure of evacuation<sup>12</sup>, **11 prisons** ended up under the Russian control after 24 February.

<sup>10</sup> For unclear reasons, the above list of institutions provided by the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine does not include another colony that ended up under the occupation – Kherson Colony no. 61. This colony is adjacent to the Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center. Russian forces took full control of Kherson on 02 March 2022. They completely overtook the Ukrainian authorities in prisons in early May 2022. On 11 November 2022, Ukrainian forces liberated Kherson and parts of Kherson and Mykolaiv region where some of the listed prisons are located.

<sup>11</sup> Press release by the Ministry of Justice, published on 31 August 2022: [https://www.facebook.com/minjust.official/posts/457529593079805/?paipv=0&eav=AfbNTIsmEEUsTR-TGkzq21C9thHA2647H6vZVqLPyPsOrQ\\_EikohXZ5VfSpKMMBmso4&\\_rdi](https://www.facebook.com/minjust.official/posts/457529593079805/?paipv=0&eav=AfbNTIsmEEUsTR-TGkzq21C9thHA2647H6vZVqLPyPsOrQ_EikohXZ5VfSpKMMBmso4&_rdi)

<sup>12</sup> Evacuation shall be carried out in accordance with the "Procedure for Mandatory Evacuation of Certain Categories of the Population in the Event of the Introduction of the Martial Law", approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 7 November 2018, No. 934. According to Resolution, the decision on evacuation, as well as the notification of its beginning, is the competence of the relevant military commands together with military administrations. The Ministry of Justice is entrusted with the organization of evacuation.

The Deputy Minister of Justice of Ukraine responsible for the prison system, Olena Vysotska, commented the situation as follows:

– We were preparing for the evacuation of institutions, but not to such a number. We did not expect such a broad front. The Ministry of Justice planned to evacuate colonies and pre-trial detention centers located near the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions occupied since 2014. However, formalities prevented this. As a ministry, we cannot independently make such decisions and ensure their implementation... Several bodies are involved in this. Evacuation decisions are made by civil-military administrations. Transportation is carried out by the National Guard, which is the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>13</sup>

However, some prisons were evacuated at later stages. According to the information we received from the Ministry of Justice, as of 30 August 2022, based on the decisions of the regional military administrations of Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions, the Ministry evacuated sentenced and remanded prisoners from 13 penitentiary institutions.<sup>14</sup>

In total, 4628 persons were evacuated: 648 prisoners on remand and 3980 sentenced to imprisonment, including 48 women, 7 minors and 215 life sentenced prisoners.

After the liberation of the Kherson region, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved a regulation requiring evacuation of prisoners from the liberated territories to the safe regions, 'if normal functioning of these institutions is impossible.'<sup>15</sup> This regulation has served as the legal basis for the Ministry of Justice to evacuate all prisoners from Kherson upon its liberation.

### Beginning of the occupation

In the beginning of the Russian occupation, places of detention in the NGCA remained under control of the Ukrainian authorities and Russian armed forces had little interaction with the administrations of places of detention. However, already in April-May 2022, the administrations and, more generally, staff of places of detention faced a dilemma: to leave their service or to collaborate with the occupying authorities.

Once the Russian occupation took root and gained control over the administration of penitentiary institutions, they began to spread an atmosphere of fear to ensure that prisoners were compliant with their rule. For example, upon entry to Kherson Pre-trial Detention Center on 11 May 2022, Russian soldiers exploded grenades and killed a prisoner. They used torture to intimidate prisoners soon after. They searched for informal prison leaders and other specific categories of prisoners in order to torture them as a punishment for their affiliations and past crimes.

According to a prisoner from Kherson pre-trial detention center the first days looked as follows:

– On the morning of 24 February, I learned from the TV news that war had begun. Russia invaded Ukraine. ... A few hours later, we heard explosions and gunshots. We were scared. We were trying to find out from prison staff what was happening and what awaited us all. They were throwing their hands up saying that we had to get strong as the war had begun. So, we had to sit quietly and wait for what happened next...

Until May, everything remained the same in the pre-trial detention center. ... It was okay until the Russians came in. ...

The Russians came to us 'loudly'. It was in the evening. Then one prisoner was killed. How it happened I was told by a person who was directly in that cell... When the Russians broke into the detention center, they shouted for us all to lie face down on the floor. The guy who was killed did not have time ... He was shot from a window that overlooked the street. ... He was shot in the head. ...

The next day they came back again. Cells were opened and prisoners were beaten. They were looking for those serving sentence for murder and rape. It seems that the prison authorities passed on information about the prisoners to them.

13 Behind bars twice: Ukrainian SIZOs and colonies under occupation: <https://www.dw.com/uk/zagratovani-dvici-so-vidbuvaetsa-v-ukrainskih-vaznicah-v-okupacii/a-63606724?maca=ukr-rss-ukrnet-ukr-all-3816-xml>

14 Vilnianska Penitentiary Institution (No. 11), Druhelyubivskiy Correctional Center (No. 1), Vilnianska Colony (No. 20), Sofiivska Colony (No. 55), Orihivska Colony (No. 88), Kamianska Colony (No. 101), Pokrovsky Colony (No. 17), Bakhmutka Penitentiary Institution (No. 6), Toretska Colony (No. 2), Selydivska Colony (No. 82), Novobuzskiy Correctional Center (No. 103). Detainees were also transferred from the Khroliv Correctional Center (No. 140) and the Kholodnohirka Colony (No. 18), although formally it was not considered evacuation.

15 Regulation no. 1219-r of 30 December 2022, on the Action Plan for the Restoration of the Liberated Territories.

A 'senior' accompanied by two machine gunners entered the cell. Everyone was ordered to lie face down on the floor. Then they asked about those who had tattoos in the form of stars on knees [a sign of affiliations with the prison sub-culture opposing the prison administration]. Those on whom were found such tattoos were beaten with rifle butts, thereby showing that the 'stars' will not help and that they were the [main] authorities.

They beat me very hard. Some of us then had broken ribs. In our cell, this is what happened. First, we were laid face down on the floor. Then they asked if there were murderers and rapists among us. Then they asked if there were any who had stars on the knees. Those who had such tattoos were ordered to stand up. One was hit in the forehead with a butt so that he fell and could not get up. The second prisoner was beaten on the ribs. The butt could hit anywhere, in the face, in the chest, in the back, in the legs ... From nearby cells, we could hear the screams of those who were being beaten. Some prisoners were taken to the exercise yards and continued to be beaten there. All this lasted up to three hours. ... For the next three days we weren't fed at all.<sup>16</sup>

In Pivnichna Colony no. 90 (Kherson region), the beginning of the Russian administration looked similar:

– The Russian military began to enter the colony from the end of April - beginning of May. At the workshops zone, they arranged their base, warehouses, production. ... When the Russians entered, a complete shmon [prison slang for strip search] was conducted through the prison. Everyone was beaten with batons. Everyone got a hit on the ass. I got hit on the back and legs. Some were beaten in such a way that even the batons broke.

Personally, physical force was not [further] used against me, since I served as a cleaner. Except that I was bullied. And the guys who were in the cells were beaten. They were beaten during searches. For example, if the colony staff did not like the way a prisoner talked. As they used to say, [if prisoners] "growl and purr". They were beaten for it. In short, they beat [prisoners] for all sorts of little things.<sup>17</sup>

A prisoner who was held in Holoprystanska Colony no. 7 (Kherson region) told of how intimidation targeted newly arrived prisoners evacuated from other prisons of the region:

– As long as prison employees were Ukrainian, everything was fine. The authorities of the colony refused to collaborate with the occupation authorities. After that, I don't not know where they went, someone managed to leave, and the head of the colony was taken to the basement ... Some of the employees remained in the colony and cooperated with the occupiers. New employees were recruited, they wore military uniforms, we did not know what their names were. There was also a new head of the colony Koval. They stopped feeding us, they gave us only bread and water soup [with too much liquid].

They shot constantly. If there were no explosions for 30 minutes, it became suspicious that something would happen. ... On 14 June 2022, **OMON** [Russian SWAT team] entered the colony and beat all the detainees, beat us on the hands, on the legs, some [of us] got their hands broken. **OMON** did not enter the colony anymore, but we were beaten by prison employees anyway. They could take us to the duty unit and beat us with rubber sticks for not liking an answer to the question that they asked. ... These [beatings] were an act of intimidation as they transferred convicts from other colonies. First, they brought [prisoners from] Snihurivska Colony no. 5, then Dariivska Colony no. 10, and later, everyone from [Pivnichna] colony No. 90.<sup>18</sup>

## Prisoners and the army

From the very beginning of the full-scale war on 24 February 2022, prisoners began to manifest their willingness to join Ukrainian armed forces. It was impossible according to the law, as persons who were imprisoned could not enlist in the armed forces.<sup>19</sup> However, the President of Ukraine pardoned at least 363 prisoners<sup>20</sup> with the aim of enabling them to join the army, particularly those prisoners who had previously served in the Ukrainian army. In addition, the Code of Criminal Procedure of Ukraine was amended to enable prisoners on remand to ask for their release in order to join the fighting.<sup>21</sup>

16 Interview with survivor A.

17 Interview with survivor B.

18 Interview with survivor C.

19 Para 6.6, art. 37 of the Law of Ukraine *On the Military Obligation and Service*.

20 Press release by the Department for the Execution of Sentences, published on 9 April 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/minjust.official/posts/355256539973778>

21 Article 616 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure of Ukraine*.

Due to the chance of being released, many prisoners, including those with life sentences, submitted written requests to prison administrations asking for release. Few requests were satisfied. The exact figures of prisoners (remand and sentenced) who submitted such requests and who were ultimately released remain unknown.

However, the number of requests from prisoners was significant. For example, a prisoner in Dariivska Colony no. 10 told us:

– Back on 27 February a first prisoner submitted a request for military service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine or territorial defense to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky. In the evening, another 20 prisoners who were former soldiers submitted the same requests. By 3 March, out of 150 prisoners of only our dorm, more than 50 had submitted identical requests.<sup>22</sup>

The requests in some cases ended up in the hands of the Russian armed forces after they gained control over some prisons, either because the prison administration did not manage to destroy the respective requests or deliberately shared them with the Russian occupying authorities. Many prisoners were consequently tortured for their willingness to defend their country.

A prisoner who was detained in Kherson pre-trial detention center recalls:

– We wrote requests asking for the opportunity to defend our motherland. These requests probably ended up in the Russians' hands. In early May ... they began to pull people out for an 'interview. I was also taken to such an interview in short-term visits premises. As soon as I got there, four armed Russians started beating me. They beat me everywhere, with rifle butts and kicks. They beat me up and then sat me down at the table. Two intelligence officers from Colony no. 90 were also present. I was warned to behave quietly and not to create problems. They also told me to forget about the idea of fighting on anyone's side.<sup>23</sup>

Those prisoners who were former Ukrainian soldiers were at particular risk during the occupation. The Ukrainian prison authorities, despite repetitive requests and warnings from such prisoners, did not undertake any measures to save them from the risk of torture and death in case of occupation.

Indeed, Russian armed forces searched for this category of prisoners first. A prisoner from Dariivska Colony no. 10 (Kherson region) recalls:

– At the beginning of March, Russians entered the territory of the colony for the first time. They went over it. They visited only the ground floor of the hospital and did not go to the first floor with patients suffering from tuberculosis. Then they went to the DIZO and PKT [disciplinary cell premises]. The management of the institution locked there those prisoners who had participated in the ATO<sup>24</sup>. They were five or six there. They were beaten, interrogated. Two of them were taken in an unknown direction.<sup>25</sup>

A prisoner from Pivnichna Colony no. 90 (Kherson region) recalls:

– When the Russians came, the head of the colony betrayed all the prisoners who participated in the ATO. Their fate was sorrowful. Many of them completely disappeared.<sup>26</sup>

Another prisoner from Pivnichna prison:

– There were two prisoners, former Ukrainian soldiers ... They tried to escape. They were caught and put to 'boksiki' [Ukrainian: lockers] next to the duty room used for beating and torture. They were beaten heavily there and afterwards taken to the pre-trial detention center at Perekopska street [in Kherson]. I do not know what happened to them after that.<sup>27</sup>

During the invasion, in addition to the widespread recruitment of Russian prisoners, the Russians army tried to recruit Ukrainian prisoners to fight in the war. For example, such recruitment took place in Kherson Colony no. 61:

22 Interview with survivor D.

23 Interview with survivor E.

24 Anti-terrorist operation (ATO) is a military operation launched by the Ukrainian government in response to the separatist movement that occurred in the east of Ukraine in 2014 and was supported and coordinated by Russia. The soldiers who took part in ATO and were civilians when Russian armed forces invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022 were primary targets of Russian armed forces during their occupation.

25 Interview with survivor F.

26 Interview with survivor G.

27 Interview with survivor B.

– They tried to persuade us to choose the side of Russia and to fight against our own country. ... The head of the living unit tried to persuade us. .... Every day he encouraged us to submit requests. Moreover, [another prison employee] Titurai invited detainees to his office and recruited us for the war against Ukraine. But not all of us. Somehow selectively. Psychologist of Colony no. 61 was also engaged in this process.

Some prisoners considered submitting such requests, but with the only motivation to reach the location of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and surrender. ‘Fighting’ for Russia was thus seen as a way to save oneself from constant beatings and pain.<sup>28</sup>

The recruitment continued in relation to those prisoners who were transferred from Ukraine to Russia. One such prisoner who was detained in a colony in Krasnodar region (Russia) recalls:

– Then the FSB came, they pulled me out. ... They asked questions. Was I offered to go to war? I told them that in Ukraine convicts are serving their sentences, not fighting. They started to tell me that I was a Nazi, evil spirit, and other stuff. They slapped me a few times.<sup>29</sup>

The private military company *Wagner*, which recruited Russian prisoners to the war in Ukraine, was also involved in recruiting Ukrainian prisoners. This was reported by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

Russian armed forces also reportedly released prisoners who were convicted by the Ukrainian authorities for crimes against national security and territorial integrity such as separatism. For example, according to the Russian news channel, 4 such persons were released from a prison in Mariupol after its occupation.<sup>31</sup>

### Imposition of the Russian citizenship and sham referenda

In the context of the illegal referenda conducted by Russia in the NGCA of Ukraine<sup>32</sup>, Russian prison administrations began to actively promote and impose Russian citizenship on Ukrainian prisoners. It appears that imposing citizenship on prisoners was considered easier than on other civilians because of the full control over them in prison.

Some prisoners accepted the citizenship voluntarily, although in the context of detention, the atmosphere of fear and widespread torture, the free will of prisoners is questionable. Those prisoners who accepted the citizenship were then forced to vote in the sham referenda.

Many prisoners refused to accept the new citizenship voluntarily. In some cases, the Russian prison administrations began to coerce them using torture and threats. For example, a prisoner who was in Kherson pre-trial detention center recalls torture for refusing Russian citizenship:

– They beat us for refusing to accept Russian citizenship. For example, I was beaten for that. The first deputy head of the pre-trial detention center, Ryzhuk, distributed application forms for Russian citizenship to all those on remand. And I was called straight to his office. I turned down that offer... Then, I was beaten very hard. Ryzhuk also beat me. I then recovered from these beatings for a week.<sup>33</sup>

In some cases, threats of torture were used. For example, a prisoner from Pivnichna Colony recalls:

– ‘Seva’ [nickname] offered me to accept Russian citizenship. Under the Russians he became the head of the remand unit in Colony no. 90 ... It was also offered to me by the assistant to the head of the pre-trial detention center Zhenya ‘Diesel’.

Under Ukraine, he was a custodial officer. Under the Russians, he became a lieutenant [higher rank] ... I declined their offer. I said that I had a Ukrainian passport and after my release I would go to Ukraine. ‘Seva’ tried to persuade me. He said that all of us would be taken to Russia, and our Ukrainian passports would be destroyed.

Some prisoners refused to accept Russian citizenship; others agreed. Those who refused were threatened.

28 Interview with survivor H.

29 Interview with survivor I.

30 Press release by the General Staff of the Armed forces of Ukraine as of 18:00, published on 4 September 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/400883772224707/>

31 In DPR, first prisoners convicted by Kyiv for separatism are released: <https://ria.ru/20220906/osvobozhdenie-1814712795.html>

32 Late September 2022, Russian-installed officials in the NGCA of Ukraine staged referendums on the annexation of occupied territories of Ukraine by Russia. They were widely described as sham referendums by commentators and denounced by various countries. Currently, the validity of the results of the referendums has only been accepted by North Korea, and no other sovereign state. These referendums also took place in penitentiary institutions in the NGCA.

33 Interview with survivor F.



They were told they would get in trouble.<sup>34</sup>

Another prisoner from Pivnichna Colony:

– They offered me Russian citizenship. I refused as I am a Ukrainian citizen. Everyone warned us that, if anyone campaigned against Russia, they would shoot us dead and register it retrospectively. They said that if I got involved in campaigning against Russia, I would be shot dead, and they would forge the papers about it.<sup>35</sup>

Prison staff in Pivnichna Colony even had a dedicated officer who promoted Russian citizenship:

– The issue of obtaining Russian citizenship was taken care of by the head of the DSR [semi-open unit of the prison] Trebushnoy Sergiy Volodymyrovych. He encouraged us to obtain Russian passports, handed out forms for us to obtain Russian citizenship. Few of us agreed to this.<sup>36</sup>

Prisoners were also tortured for not participating in the sham referenda arranged by the Russian administration:

– They wanted to take us to vote on the day of the pseudo-referendum. From our cell, out of 18 convicts, me and ... [another prisoner, name redacted] refused to take part in this. For this we received a couple of beats with a baton. But one prison guard praised us for this.<sup>37</sup>

– Regarding the referendum. *Blatnye* [informal prison leaders] ... along with the administration warned us that, if we voted against, there would be 'consequences'.<sup>38</sup>

In some cases, prisoners who refused to participate in the sham referenda were taken for a DNA test for unclear reasons:

– As for the campaigning, first, the prison director came. ... He said that there would be a referendum. He came to the cell and told us: "if you make any disturbances, refuse, we can still sign without you. It is better not to painfully doubt, and sign what they need. That's it!" We informed him immediately that we wouldn't sign. After that, our cell refused to sign. When this referendum came, they pulled us all allegedly for coronavirus tests, but did DNA tests...<sup>39</sup>

## Forced labour

Russian armed forces used prisons for engaging prisoners' labour. The labour was used for accomplishing support tasks for the military. Although our data only reflect a few cases of coerced labour, the voluntary character of other prisoners' labour cannot be assumed due to the general atmosphere of fear and the fact that the labour was conducted without being paid for it.

## A detainee who was imprisoned in Kherson pre-trial detention center:

– They forced me to work. They did it in a rude and aggressive way. The work was different ... repairs, loading and unloading. It was like in a concentration camp. We were treated like slaves. We were told that we meant nothing.

Repairs were made in the room where a sewing workshop was supposed to be arranged. The four of us worked. Me, [name of a prisoner redacted] and two others I don't know. By that time, the situation with food in the detention center had stabilized, but we, the workers, were not fed. They said: "why do you need lunch? You must work and not be distracted". If the defined amount of work was not done, they would beat us.<sup>40</sup>

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34 Interview with survivor B.

35 Interview with survivor I.

36 Interview with survivor J.

37 Interview with survivor K.

38 Interview with survivor E.

39 Interview with survivor L.

40 Interview with survivor M.

**A detainee who was from Pivnichna Colony no. 90:**

– Many of us were illegally transferred to the DSR.<sup>41</sup> ... If you refuse or don't want to do ... a certain job, you would be threatened with shooting your knees. You understand how 'nice' it is to work when the Russians with machine guns are hanging over you.

First, we were mainly engaged in loading and unloading works. Then we did repairs in the HQ. At the industrial zone, we milled timber for the needs of the Russian army, we also made barbed wire 'Egoza' for [military] barriers.<sup>42</sup>

**Another prisoner from Pivnichna Colony no. 90 who was repeatedly taken to works recalls:**

– We worked at one facility; it was a police school. There, the Russians set up their base, and we did all the necessary work for this. We dug trenches, protected windows with sandbags, arranged beds, loaded or unloaded furniture, unloaded Russian cars with food, etc. If we refused to work, we would be transferred to the other prisoners in the colony.

There was also a similar work in the SBU [Security Service of Ukraine] building, the building of the regional and city administrations. From there, we took out documentation, furniture, computers and other equipment. Everything that interested the Russians. When the Armed Forces of Ukraine launched a missile strike on a Russian base at the police school, they moved us to a sports school. There we also dug trenches and arranged everything.<sup>43</sup>

A prisoner who was imprisoned in Holoprystanska Colony no. 7 (Kherson region) told us how prisoners' labour was used to process timber and produce anti-tank barriers ('hedgehogs'):

– Two machines were brought to the sawmill plant in the colony, the convicts produced boards for the dugouts of the Russians. Even the sick prisoners worked. ... Trucks drove into the territory of the colony, trees were brought in, which were cut into girders, and then the cars came to pick them up. They were driven by the Russian army in uniform and with machine guns.<sup>44</sup>

Other prisoners from this prison recalled that Russian soldiers looted the prison and used prisoners to bake bread for them:

– One day, the Russian military entered the territory of the colony and accompanied by an employee of the colony, inspected the territory. The Russians took away an excavator from the industrial zone [of the prison]. Also, in the colony bread was baked for the Russian military.<sup>45</sup>

– Russian soldiers were placed near the territory of the colony. Food was cooked and bread was baked for them in the colony. DSR<sup>46</sup> prisoners who worked in the village were engaged in works on Chornobaivka poultry farm. It is a huge farm of three million chickens. The Russians began robbing the poultry farm. And some of the products, live chickens and eggs were brought to the colony. The inmates gutted the chickens. A chicken coop was built in the colony. Eggs were collected from there.<sup>47</sup>

**Penitentiary institutions as shields and sites for storing ammunition**

There are indications that Russian armed forces used penitentiary institutions for military purposes. Some prisons were turned into ammunition depots and garages for armed vehicles. In some cases, prisoners were transferred to other prisons so that prison premises could be emptied for such purposes. However, in some prisons which were turned into military depots, prisoners continued to remain in them.

In addition, in at least three cases, missile launchers were reportedly placed next to a penitentiary institution. Reports suggest that missile systems were placed close to Dariivska Colony no. 10 (Kherson region), Kherson Colony no. 61 (adjacent to Kherson pre-trial detention center), and Pivnichna Colony no. 90 (Kherson region). These are strong indications that the Russian armed forces used prisoners and prison staff as human shields.

41 Separate prison unit outside prison where prisoners can be transferred after a certain period of their detention. Placement in this unit is considered a privilege that applies to those prisoners who wish to work in civilian enterprises non-affiliated with the prison.

42 Interview with survivor G.

43 Interview with survivor J.

44 Interview with survivor C.

45 Interview with survivor N.

46 Separate prison unit outside prison where prisoners can be transferred after a certain period of their detention. Placement in this unit is considered a privilege that applies to those prisoners who wish to work in civilian enterprises non-affiliated with the prison.

47 Interview with survivor O.

In August 2022, a few prisoners independently reported that in Dariivska Colony no. 10 (Kherson region) Russian armed forces established an ammunition depot.

**Later, similar reports came from Pivnichna Colony no. 90:**

– The Russian military vehicles (armoured personnel carriers, tanks, MLRS 'Grad') have already entered the industrial zone [of the prison]. We could see that clearly... An ammunition depot was established 100 meters away from our prison.<sup>48</sup>

– I could see the entrance to the colony from my window. They established a military base on the territory of the industrial zone [of the prison]. Their military vehicles stopped by there. Their ammunition depot was also located there.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of August 2022, information about explosions close to the Pivnichna Colony no. 90 caused by detonation of the ammunition depot of the Russian armed forces appeared in open sources.<sup>50</sup>

According to the information we received from interviewees, the explosions took place in the industrial (workshops) zone of the prison:

– Our [Ukrainian] troops hit the ammunition depot in the industrial zone. The Armed Forces of Ukraine heavily shelled the industrial zone in early summer. The next heavy shelling took place in September [2022]. The ammunition depot was hit then. Shell fragments had been flying for two days. The administration was looking for spotters among the prisoners.<sup>51</sup>

– We watched the trucks entering and exiting the industrial zone every day. The damaged military equipment was being repaired. Then another shelling happened there. Our Ukrainian forces hit the ammunition depot which was exploding for two hours. The shelling fragments were flying through the windows and the building.<sup>52</sup>

– There were two shelling of the colony. The strikes were accurate to the warehouses in the industrial zone. In one of them there was an ammunition depot. It was clear because after the hitting the explosions continued for another one hour and a half. This happened one evening. Two days later the sawmill was hit where Russians milled timber.<sup>53</sup>

After this incident, the prison administration began to retaliate against prisoners:

– During the shelling, prison staff ran to the shelters, and we stayed in our dorms. It wasn't until things calmed down that the guards showed up and counted us. They checked if prisoners had not escaped.

After these events, the administration began to look for possible fire spotters among the prisoners. They somehow learned that some prisoners cooperated with the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

– This is how my comrade [name redacted] came under suspicion. He was summoned and taken to the prison intelligence unit. Then we learned from other inmates that he was taken away with a bag on his head and handcuffed. We didn't hear anything else about him anymore. And we, those who were friends with him, were all put in the disciplinary for 14 days.<sup>54</sup>

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48 Interview with survivor E.

49 Interview with survivor P.

50 *In Kherson, strong explosions next to a base of the occupiers:* <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/08/27/7365061/>

51 Interview with survivor E.

52 Interview with survivor Q.

53 Interview with survivor R.

54 Interview with survivor S.

## B. POLICE ESTABLISHMENTS

The Russian armed forces and the occupation police in the NGCA used local police stations as their key administration units in the newly occupied towns. Around 100 police establishments ended up under occupation.<sup>55</sup> Our reports indicate that police stations were regularly used to establish the Russian occupation regime by detaining and torturing local citizens. Detention and torture were used as a means of intimidating, punishing, coercing, and extracting information. The occupation police force was comprised not only of Russians, but also of the Ukrainians who agreed to serve for Russia.

Police stations were used for arbitrary detention and the basements of police stations were turned into torture chambers. Official holding cells of police stations and cells in 'ITT facilities' (the Ukrainian police temporary detention facilities)<sup>56</sup> were also used for the same purposes. The widespread use of the police stations for illegal detention and torture was mostly discovered upon liberation of parts of NGCA by the Ukrainian armed forces, although individual indications of such violations appeared already during the occupation.

Police establishments are not designed for long-term detention. However, the Russian armed forces used them for such detention, which in some cases exceeded three months. There has been little information about those who were detained, including the duration, grounds, and capacity in which they were detained.

Food, medication, and other basic necessities were not available to the necessary extent and were only provided occasionally. Cleaning and other works necessary to maintain police stations were performed by detained civilians.

## C. SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS

The situation in social and health care institutions worsened soon after 24 February 2022. The regular supply of water, electricity and heating was interrupted. Logistics became difficult and even impossible, which left the institutions cut from the outside world.

During the initial periods of occupation, these institutions continued to use their remaining stocks of food, medication, and other necessities. They had to survive relying on volunteers and other alternative resources such as asking other state institutions to share their stocks (e.g. medication from local hospitals). In addition, many staff members of the places of detention left their service for various reasons such as evacuation or unwillingness to collaborate with the occupying authorities. Unlike in police and penitentiary institutions, the Russian armed forces did not introduce new administrations and staff in social and health care institutions. This may be due to the transfer of persons from these institutions from the NGCA of Ukraine to other NGCA of Ukraine as well as the territory of Russia at later stage.

For example, in Kherson region, more than 100 persons were transferred from Dniprianskyi Psychoneurological Institution for people with mental disorders to Crimea.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the Russian armed forces deported the residents of Holoprystan Geriatric Nursing Home. Those residents who could not move independently were transferred to Henichesk (Kherson region, NGCA). The others were transferred to Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014.<sup>58</sup>

Currently, there is no official data available on the number of social and health care institutions that ended up in the NGCA of Ukraine. However, there are some numbers of persons who remained in such institutions that are indicative of their large scale.

For example, as of March 2022, about 6000 patients remained in Ukrainian social institutions (e.g. psychiatric hospitals, geriatric institutions, orphanages) in the NGCA. At least an estimated 42 such institutions were in the NGCA, and therefore they were deprived of regular support and supplies.<sup>59</sup> As of 25 March 2022, the largest number of such institutions was in Kherson region - at least 10. Not a single institution was evacuated from this region. In addition, in each of the regions of Chernihiv, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Sumy regions there were at least six such institutions. At the same time, there is information that orphanages were transferred from the NGCA by Russian armed forces.<sup>60</sup> In addition, according to a recent report, at least 6000 Ukrainian children were transferred to Russia.<sup>61</sup>

55 *Head of the National Police: "In the register of illegal armed units – more than 2 million records":* <https://mvs.gov.ua/uk/news/golova-nacpoliciji-v-rejestri-cleniv-nezakonnix-zbroinix-formuvan-bilse-2-mln-zapisiv>

56 See note 5.

57 *Occupation authorities of Kherson region transferred more than 100 persons from Dnipranksy Boarding House:* <https://suspilne.media/311110-okupacijna-vlada-hersonsini-vivezla-ponad-100-pidopicnih-dnipranskogo-budinku-internatu-hersonska-ova/>

58 *Occupants create an artificial humanitarian crisis in Hola Prystan:* <https://khoda.gov.ua/okupanti-shtucho-stvorjujut-guman%D1%96tarnu-krizu-u-gol%D1%96j-pristan%D1%96>

59 *More than 6.000 persons in boarding houses are left on the occupied territories – human rights activists:* [https://lb.ua/society/2022/03/31/511818\\_okupovanih\\_teritoriyah.html](https://lb.ua/society/2022/03/31/511818_okupovanih_teritoriyah.html)

60 Ibid.

61 *Russia's Systematic Program for the Re-Education and Adoption of Ukraine's Children:* <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/home/pages/children-camps-1>

## 5. IDENTIFIED VIOLATIONS (STATISTICS)

### Types of violations

This report is based on 725 incidents recorded by our monitors that are indicative of human rights violations taking place during March-December 2022. Henceforth we refer to these as 'violations' or 'reports of'. The number of violations recorded should by no means be understood as reflecting total numbers, which we estimate are significantly higher, or proportions of violations.

The 725 violations fall into specific categories: torture; inadequate conditions of detention; artillery shelling/air strike/missile strike; killings/executions; and 'other' (such as illegal arrests and detention). Some violations were comprised by abuses simultaneously falling into two or more categories. The most common was torture, which, in addition to being a human rights violation, may also constitute a war crime and/or a crime against humanity.

We have recorded 152 reports of torture and other ill-treatment in places of detention; 101 reports of inadequate conditions of detention, which in some cases could amount to ill treatment or torture; 113 artillery shellings/air strikes/missile strikes; and 46 killings/executions.<sup>62</sup>

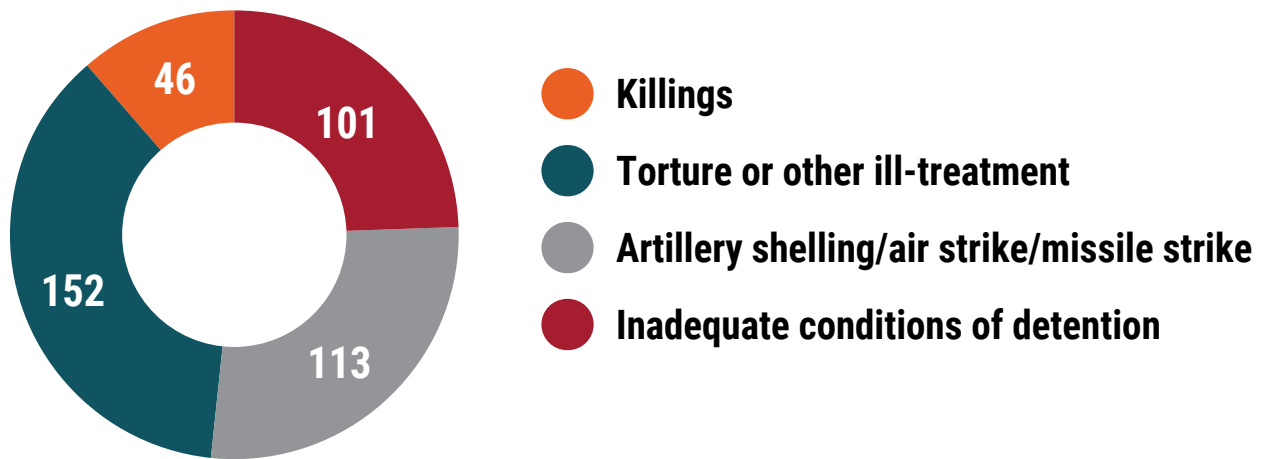


Figure 1 Types of violations

### Regions of violations

The monitoring covers the incidents that took place in the NGCA or in the GCA in case they originated from the hostilities, namely in case of military strikes. Some information was collected in the Ukrainian GCA concerning the places of detention in the NGCA, including those that were liberated by the Ukrainian armed forces.

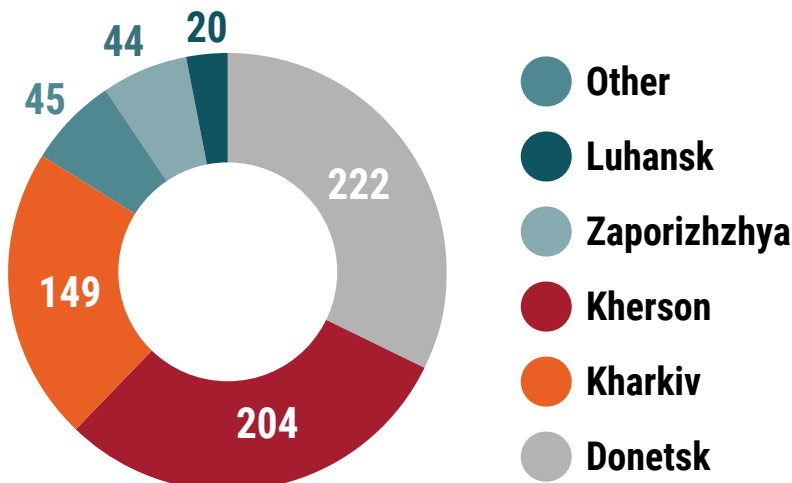


Figure 2 Region of Recorded Violation

<sup>62</sup> We also identified 313 'other' violations that are not a focus of the present report, such as illegal arrests and arbitrary detention, and are not included in Figure 1. This type of information was used to corroborate some of the report's findings.

### Legal status of places of detention

Around two-thirds of the violations took place in official places of detention, while the remaining incidents took place in unofficial places of detention. Some places of detention were official, but detainees were kept in their basements that were not designed for detention. For the purposes of this report, we still considered such places as official.

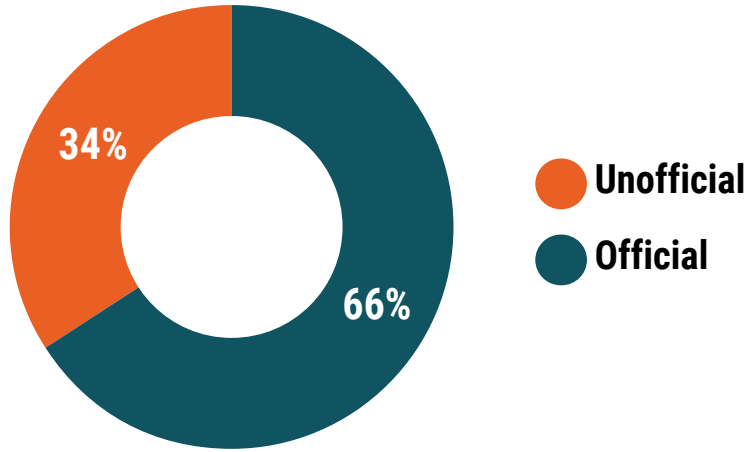


Figure 3 Incident by legal status of official places of detention

This report concerns the following types of official places of detention:

- Penitentiary institutions: colonies, pre-trial detention centers, correctional centers.
- Police facilities: police stations, police administration buildings, temporary detention facilities (ITT).<sup>63</sup>
- Social and health care institutions: psychiatric institutions (hospitals and psychoneurological dispensers), geriatric centers [Ukrainian: 'pansionaty'], and boarding houses/orphanages [Ukrainian: 'internaty'].

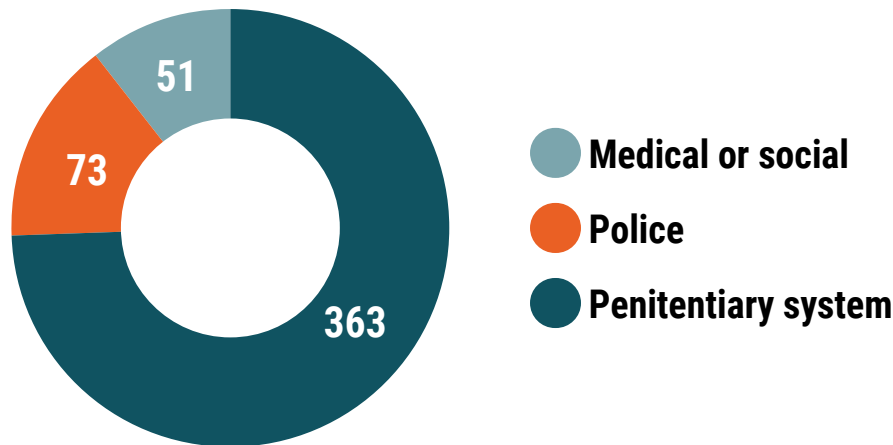


Figure 4 Types of institutions

## 6. TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

We documented 152 incidents of torture and other ill-treatment. Most of these reports come from Kherson region (84) and Kharkiv region (46), although some of them came from other regions: Donetsk (9), Kyiv (5), Zaporizhzhia (4) and Mykolaiv (4). This data illustrates an important finding: the longer a region was under occupation, the more cases of torture were reported. Another observation is that most of the reports about torture came after liberation. During the occupation information about torture in the NGCA was mostly inaccessible and very limited.

Below follows a description of some reported cases of torture and ill-treatment, first from official places of detention and then from unofficial places of detention.

### I) OFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION

#### Penitentiary institutions

During the initial period after 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian prison administrations continued to function independently from the Russian occupying authorities. However, once stabilised in the NGCA, the Russian authorities established their own administrations of prisons. The new prison administrations consisted of new staff from Russia and former Ukrainian prison staff who agreed to collaborate with them. A significant number of Ukrainian prison employees in the NGCA left their service once faced with the choice to serve for the occupation administration or to resign. In some prisons, reportedly up to 80% of prison staff resigned.

To enforce their control within prisons, the new Russian prison administrations intimidated, tortured, and killed prisoners. The methods of torture included foremost kicks, blows, slaps, beatings with truncheons, hooding, positional torture, electric shocks, and mock executions.

The information collected indicates the systematic and widespread nature of physical and psychological torture and other ill-treatment against detainees. We received reports from prisoners detained in seven prisons in the NGCA, and all of them allege that torture was used in their prisons by the Russian administration. Common purposes were to establish and maintain control over prisons, to obtain information, to intimidate, to coerce to action such as providing various written and oral statements, and to identify and retaliate against prisoners who cooperated with the Ukrainian forces.

Below are selected testimonies of some survivors of torture.

#### Kherson Colony no. 61, Kherson region

One of our interlocutors in Kherson Colony no. 61 described the change of prison administration and how torture became a common practice after the Russian occupation:

– Three days after the Russian invasion, the Russian military entered our colony. They did not enter prisoners' cells. They inspected the territory, went around the perimeter. There were four or five of them. The prison director Sobolev accompanied them. There were no major changes during March and April. But on 1 May, a whole shift of employees did not come to work. The prison director, Sobolev, notified his subordinates that by 1 June they had to decide whether they would cooperate with the Russian occupiers or not. In case of disagreement, they had to resign.

Already in May [2022], new employees of the administration appeared. They wore Russian uniforms. Those who remained from the previous staff wore Ukrainian uniforms, although without Ukrainian symbols. ... During my stay in the disciplinary cell, I was often beaten. It happened during every in-cell search. Searches were frequent.

When the Russian administration was established in the colony, the staff became much more aggressive. Once I saw a prisoner with a broken leg brought to our prison. I saw another prisoner with strangulation marks on his neck. He was taken somewhere for a couple of days. Obviously, they were tortured. Prisoners were beaten every day. That was the norm.<sup>64</sup>

The new prison administration started to regularly use torture soon after occupation. Torture was used, among others, for the purposes of obtaining information and intimidating prisoners. In many cases, we also obtained the names of the alleged perpetrators or those who cooperated. For example, one interviewee recalls:

– The Ukrainian flag hung in the colony until June [2022]. Then the ‘Russian order’ began. They started beating us. Everybody would beat us. All staff. They beat me for anything. I looked at something in a wrong way, I said something in a wrong way...

One day, on 12 July, I was called to a room where parcels are handed over. It was attended by the Head of Security Balatsky. There, they put a bag over my head, wrapped the handcuffs with duct tape, and took me to Colony no. 61. I was taken out by the Head of the Intelligence [Ukrainian: ‘operatyvny’] Department of the regional prison administration Demchenko and an intelligence officer [Ukrainian ‘oper’] Chernikov. ... On Friday 15 July 2022, I found myself in the disciplinary cell of Colony no. 61. Where I was moved and where I was placed between 12.07 and 15.07, I do not know. It felt like some basement because the steps led down.

On Friday 15 July 2022, I found myself in the disciplinary cell of Colony no. 61. In the colony, I was placed in a small two-bed cell on the second floor of the disciplinary isolation unit (DIZO). I was the only prisoner on the whole floor. The rest of the prisoners were downstairs on the first floor. Kovalchuk San Sanych, deputy head of colony 61, gave an order to ‘freeze’ (isolate) me completely, and only the duty officer in the prison came to feed me. ... When I was put in the cell, they handcuffed me to the bed and wrapped my hands and fingers with duct tape so that I could not ‘open up’ [suicide by cutting veins]. ...

The days in the cell went like this. The colony attendant comes in, unties me, feeds me, ties me up again, picks up the plate and leaves. Half an hour later, he comes in again, unties me from the bed, fastens the handcuffs, hands behind my back, a bag on my head and drags me [on the floor]. I knew we were going down the alley, and there we were going to some basement. They unlocked the handcuffs and hooked my hands on the pipe. Or they put me on the table and beat me on the heels – the table was shaky – and fastened my right hand to the table.

I was forced to sign some documents. I didn't see what those documents were, as the bag was not removed from my head. They just put their hand on it and told me to sign it. They only took the bag off my head in the cell.

Sometimes, I was tortured with electric shocks and lost consciousness three times. I was poured with water for waking up. Electrodes were tied to an arm and lower leg...<sup>65</sup>

Torture perpetrators were sometimes impossible to identify as they deliberately hid their identity:

– Until May, none of the Russian army came to us. ... On 11 May, we heard shootings and grenade explosions. From the window, people in black uniforms could be seen entering the cells with life prisoners. Half an hour later, the Russian troops were already in our living unit. Through the ‘feeders’, without opening the cells, they ordered us to lie down on the floor. They told me to pray. It was a threat...

From that moment on, there were beatings every night during the inspection. People in masks, in black uniforms without any [official] symbols, with skull chevrons, came to our cells. They ordered us to lie face down on the floor or to kneel with hands up. At the same time, prisoners were beaten. Sometimes they provoked, shouted: "Glory to Ukraine!" Some of the prisoners automatically replied: "Glory to the Heroes!"<sup>66</sup> Then they were taken out and never returned.<sup>67</sup>

Russian officials used both physical and psychological methods of torture to achieve their purposes. The purposes were mostly to obtain information, intimidate, and coerce to action such as providing various written and oral statements:

– Once, there were Russians who introduced themselves as policemen. They interrogated me. They were interested in where my father served. I didn't tell them anything. I replied that I didn't know anything. Then they said that they would come later, after the referendums.<sup>68</sup> They told me to think and ‘prepare’ well by then. If I didn't say anything, they promised me ‘a real hell’. They threatened to make me a handicap for life. The next time they arrived was on 3 October [2022]. ‘The police’ were accompanied by Russian soldiers. ... The Russians handcuffed me, put a hat over my eyes and wrapped me with duct tape. They put another bag on top. My handcuffed hands were pulled back and I was wrapped in duct tape from my elbow to shoulders. ...

65 Interview with survivor O.

66 A patriotic greeting in Ukraine, widely used since the beginning of the Russian war on Ukraine in 2014.

67 Interview with survivor H.

68 Late September 2022, Russian-installed officials in the NGCA of Ukraine staged illegal referendums on the annexation of occupied territories of Ukraine by Russia. They were widely described as sham referendums by commentators and denounced by various countries. Currently, the validity of the results of the referendums has only been accepted by North Korea, and no other sovereign state. These referendums also took place in penitentiary institutions in the NGCA.



It looked like a kidnapping. I was put in a car and driven for quite a while. They brought me to some village, took me to a room that resembled a KPZ [a cell in a police station]. In this room, there were traces of blood on the walls and on the floor. They sat me down on a bench and put pieces of paper on the table, told me to write "what I knew". I was required to testify about prisoners who might have transmitted the coordinates of our prison to the Ukrainian army. It turned out that one of the inmates reported that my father was a soldier. So, I came under suspicion. I was required to give my father's contacts. And that's what I feared the most. I was afraid that I could be used to blackmail my father. I wrote on the sheets of paper that I was given that I worked as a builder in the colony ...

Then I was taken to an office where there were only military men. I was slapped. I told them in detail how I ended up there. ... The military asked 'the police' why they brought me there at all. And again, they handed me over to the intelligence officers who brought me there. I slept there. They didn't feed me; they only gave me a litre and a half of water. The next day, the intelligence officers beat me...

They tried to persuade me to renounce my Ukrainian citizenship and go over to the side of Russia. The whole process was filmed on a video camera. I was also required on camera to make an appeal to my relatives so that they would not interfere with the Russian army and go over to the side of the occupiers. I was frankly fooling around, because I was sure that I would not get out of there alive. I said all sorts of nonsense on camera. I ended up being hit so hard with the stock [of a firearm] that I lost consciousness. I woke up already in a car.<sup>69</sup>

Torture was used to impose control in prison and to identify and retaliate against prisoners who cooperated with the Ukrainian forces:

– They stripped me down to my underwear. They put me against the wall and beat me on the buttocks with a truncheon. I was hit twenty times. ... And then there was this 'warm welcome'. And it was not the Russians, but Ukrainian collaborators who beat me. I was beaten by the deputy head of intelligence unit [Ukrainian: 'operchast'] Mikhalych, the duty officer, Stepanych, and the junior officer [Ukrainian: 'praporschyk'] Anatoly. Afterwards they also beat me often. Sometimes for lying on the bed, then for smoking a cigarette from the electric outlet, for opposing a remark [from the administration] ... They beat me for everything.

In the last days of the occupation, when ... they started evacuating, we saw that the administration was frightened by what was happening. ... They began to transfer to us, prisoners from the pre-trial detention center. Still untried. There were not enough places in the pre-trial detention center. One was brought in, who was accused of being a spotter of fire [Ukrainian: 'korrektirovshchik'] of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He was shot in the buttocks. A confession was knocked out of him.<sup>70</sup>

Some types of psychological torture, such as mock executions, were used to extract information from prisoners:

– On 5 November, I was taken out of my cell. This was done by Kovalev<sup>71</sup> accompanied by two 'kadyrovtsy'.<sup>72</sup> I was taken to the second floor. I was put against the wall with my legs stretched. ... Kovalev held a syringe in his hands. He hinted that there was a 'truth serum' in it. He said that they were aware of my cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. I denied it. Then I was taken to the industrial [workshop] zone of the prison. They put a bag over my head and placed me in a pit. They shot over my head with an automatic firearm. Having achieved nothing from me, they returned me back.<sup>73</sup>

### Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center, Kherson region

An interviewee described the first day when the Russian armed forces entered the Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center:

– Until 11 May, everything was relatively the same as before the occupation. But that day, at lunchtime, Russian soldiers came to our pre-trial detention center. The acting head of the center invited them to suppress the non-existent riot of prisoners.

The troops threw grenades, fired machine guns. ... The Russian armed forces entered the cells, ordered everyone to lie on the floor. They were wearing masks and we didn't see their faces. They shouted that it was Russia, and Ukraine would never be there.

69 Interview with survivor U.

70 Interview with survivor U.

71 The former head of prison security (Ukrainian: 'rezhym') in Pivnichna Colony no. 90.

72 The terms 'kadyrovec' (in plural 'kadyrovtsy') refers to any armed, ethnically-Chechen man under the control of Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov.

73 Interview with survivor H.

They checked the tattoos. If they didn't like the tattoo, they beat us. Especially if it was a tattoo with Ukrainian symbols. Prisoners with such tattoos had to burn them out.

The Russians entered the cells and beat us with butts and [kicked] their legs, on the head, on the face, on the back. They had all their feet in blood. They demanded to hand over mobile phones. I was being beaten so often during the entire occupation that I cannot even say how many times. They beat with what they had, wherever [on the body] it landed. They were not afraid that injuries would remain. If a person resisted and protested, they took him to the disciplinary cell. [After that] some [people] disappeared.<sup>74</sup>

Torture was also used as a "welcome" method for the newly arrived prisoners from other prisons who had been transferred to this pre-trial detention center:

– We were brought to Kherson pre-trial detention center at 18.00. As soon as you jump out from the prison van you see immediately the corridor of guards with batons. The faster you run through this corridor, the fewer beats you get on the back. They chased us through this corridor and lined us up in the courtyard.

They started picking at us for not being shaven. And we had neither water nor electricity within the last days. Food was once a day. What kind of shaving?! We had nothing to even wash ourselves. Some 'bearded men' were burned with lighters. Some were given five minutes to shave. And what to shave with? Everything was taken away! And, if we were not shaved, then we were beaten and burned with a lighter.<sup>75</sup>

Later, prisoners in the pre-trial detention center were tortured if they expressed their dissatisfaction with any aspect of the imprisonment:

– The Russians came into our cell. I was hit on the head and on the back, then they picked me up and ordered me to give my phone. I said I didn't have one. Then they threatened me with a machine gun and said that if they found a phone, they would kill everyone in the cell...

The presence of Russians in the pre-trial detention center was permanent. They were based near the pre-trial detention center. Often, they entered the territory of the institution. ... Once, relatives brought a fast cooker to one prisoner from our cell. But the administration did not pass it. Then we started protesting, saying that we would submit complaints. The custodial officer on duty that day ended up opening the door of our cell and ordering everyone to: "Go out into the hallway!". Then we were brought to the waiting room. There were the deputy head of the pre-trial detention center San Sanych and other representatives of the institution's management. Then they asked: "So you want a fast cooker?" And started beating.

They faced me to the wall, the legs stretched. They beat me with rubber sticks. On the back, on the buttocks. But most of all on the ribs. When I couldn't stand it and fell, they continued to kick me. I was fainting from this beating. To regain conscience, they poured water from the bottle on me. Then they asked, "Are there still any questions?" I replied that I had no questions anymore. My left collarbone and ribs were broken.

They beat us often. For the slightest offense or when we asked for something. For example, potable water. They took us into the hallway and beat. They beat us once just because we asked the food distributor why he gave us so little bread (a loaf for eight people). The custodial officer heard this and reported it to the authorities. Then, we were all taken to the corridor and beaten. Every day I heard the cries of people who were beaten.<sup>76</sup>

Torture accompanied prison searches:

– I was taken out and beaten. Before that, they had stripped me naked. Five officers beat me. They beat me with sticks. They hit my legs, liver, kidney, and anywhere they could reach. They were beating me for fifteen minutes. ... I sought medical care, but they refused.<sup>77</sup>

Those prisoners who had tattoos were tortured as it was a sign of adherence to the prison subculture that traditionally opposed any prison administration:

– I was personally beaten, I had blood in my urine for a month and a half. When I showed my tattoos they hit me on the head with a rifle, two of them began to kick me, threw me on the ground, hit me in the back and on my kidneys with a rifle. Four people were beating me. They were beating me for 5 minutes until I fainted, then they poured water on me and began to beat again.

74 Interview with survivor V.

75 Interview with survivor E.

76 Interview with survivor W.

77 Interview with survivor X.

After that they threw me on the bed. They put a gun in the mouth of one of the cellmates and ordered him to confess whether or not he loved his homeland. He didn't know what to answer, his nose was broken. His name was [redacted].<sup>78</sup>

Torture was also used for any manifestations of patriotism to Ukraine:

– Then the door opened. Russian soldiers, 6 people in masks and with Russian chevrons dressed in ordinary camouflage, entered. They shouted: "On the floor!"

They started beating us immediately after throwing a grenade. They hit my legs, back, head, kidneys... Someone hid under the bed, someone stayed lying. They asked about tattoos, asked to show them. They beat us when they found them.

They asked whether there were any former Ukrainian soldiers. We denied. They asked whether we were Ukrainians or Russians. The ones who answered to be Ukrainian were beaten.<sup>79</sup>

Mock executions and other torture were used as a way of collective punishment of prisoners:

– The next day, they brought 9 prisoners from 'outcasts' [the lowest class of prisoners in the informal hierarchy, e.g. because of their sexual crime] to clean up the territory of the pre-trial detention center. Two of them escaped from the prison at about 4 p.m. or 5 p.m. When this was discovered, two SWAT units came to us, as well as the [prison staff] collaborators and Sobolev.

The Russians beat us, humiliated us. They forced us to kneel in front of the wall and fired over our heads with machine guns. First with single shots, then with bursts. We were accused of their escape.

At first, while they were looking for fugitives on the territory of the institution, we simply stood, later squatted. Then we were forced to do push-ups, stand on one leg, then on the other. Then we performed the order "Lie down!" We had to fall face to the ground.

They beat us with rifles. At the same time, they were saying humiliating words about our armed forces, about President Zelenskyy. They claimed that they had come [to Ukraine] forever and from that moment there would be 'order'. All of this took place for four hours. When it ended, it was already night. There was no dinner that day.

We were warned that the video cameras were working. That there were snipers around the perimeter. And if we wanted to live, we had to not [try to] leave the premises. The next day, breakfast was cooked, and the prisoners were fed.<sup>80</sup>

### Dariivska Colony no. 10, Kherson region

A prisoner who served a sentence in this prison described how torture was used to intimidate prisoners during searches:

– In early July, employees of the penal colony, accompanied by five or six Russian soldiers, came to us to do the so-called 'shmon' [search] and 'prybyvalovo'.<sup>81</sup> There were up to forty people in total. This group included: The head of security [Ukrainian for security is 'rezhym'] of Colony no. 90, DPNK [main duty officer] Yuryevich, from Colony no. 10, two officers from Colony no. 7.

We were ordered to go out into the hallway with our personal belongings. They turned our belongings out of our bags to the floor and scattered them down the hallway with their feet.

I made a remark that they had to behave more cautiously with other people's belongings. Then they started beating me. They beat me with their hands and feet all over the body. The beating of prisoners was widespread. Then we were taken to the exercise yards, and they continued beatings. We were faced to the wall for stretching (hands up, and legs had to be stretched). They beat us with rubber sticks on the buttocks and legs.

In general, beatings were the norm. The beating of prisoners was widespread. They beat us for everything and for nothing.<sup>82</sup>

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78 Interview with survivor Y.

79 Interview with survivor Y.

80 Interview with survivor Z.

81 Repressive actions of intimidation with the use of brute physical force under the guise of a search.

82 Interview with survivor F.

### Pivnichna Colony no. 90, Kherson region

Until May 2022, the Russian armed forces did not try to establish its rule in this prison, but then it changed:

– From May everything began to change. The security requirements became harsher. Beatings of prisoners began. It was possible to receive punishment – beating or imprisonment in a disciplinary cell – for completely minor offenses or violations. They could even resort to punishment if a staff representative did not like the tone with which the prisoner addressed him. They punished if you did not immediately obey. They could also punish if they didn't like the outlook of the prisoner.

Sometimes they made a disciplinary report on these violations, sometimes not. But punishment was inevitable. They usually beat us like that. They put us on face to the wall with legs stretched and arms turned outwards. Then they beat on the buttocks and legs with a truncheon.<sup>83</sup>

The new administration started to use torture for intimidating prisoners and imposing a tough discipline:

– Searches could be carried out at any time. Six people come in, turn everything upside down in the cell, make a mess... And if someone starts to object, they drag this person to the duty station and beat him there. I was also beaten more than once. This usually happened during check-ups. If you said something wrong, you stood wrong – you were taken to the duty station, legs stretched, face against the wall, and beaten with batons on your legs. They hit on the legs, buttocks, back, ribs.

I was beaten like that because I got off my bed slowly. [Because] my back was sore. As soon as I got off the upper bed, they didn't like it. They took me to the duty station after the check-up and seven of them were beating me with the participation of 'Seva', the head of the pre-trial detention unit of Colony no. 90. ...

The head of the security, Usachev, was present. He kicked me, demanded an apology from me. It was not clear what the apology was for. ... They were beating me for about ten minutes. Ten minutes later, when I got back my breath, they put me back in the cell. My back and legs were black from the beatings.<sup>84</sup>

Another prisoner was tortured because his sister was discovered to be a military volunteer in Mariupol. At some point, he was abducted from Pivnichna Colony no. 90:

– In the morning, at eight, four Russian soldiers in balaclavas [masks] ran to my dormitory, put a bag on my head and took me out of the colony. For the next almost five months, I was not in the colony.

First, I was brought to the office of an operative officer, the first deputy director of the colony. They started beating and mocking me there. I was beaten by the deputy director, two intelligence officers of the colony and four Russians who had taken me from the barracks. They demanded to give them my phone. They said that they knew what they were doing and what position my sister was holding. They forced me to admit that I transmitted the coordinates of the location of the Russian troops to the Ukrainian armed forces. They also insisted that I request my relatives not obey the Ukrainian authorities and resist Russian troops. I was beaten, strangled. When I lost consciousness, water was poured over me.

On the third day, I asked my tormentors ... [to] finish me off, because I didn't have anything to tell them. Then one of them took off the balaclava and I saw that it was most likely a 'kadyrovec'.<sup>85</sup> He called someone of his supervisors, showed me to him through the phone. The one on the phone just nodded and said nothing.

But they kept torturing me. My hands were turned back and shackled. I was laid on the floor face down, strangled with wire from the extension cable. When I started to lose consciousness, they said: "Wait. It's too early. You haven't gone through all seven [sic!] circles of hell yet".<sup>86</sup>

A prisoner was punished for not participating in the illegal referenda:

They beat me for not voting. Because of this, they arranged a search, dragged me outside to the exercise yard and began to beat me there. They beat me with batons, hands against the wall, they beat me everywhere while I was standing, on my back, on my legs, on my head. When I fell, they also beat me on the ground.<sup>87</sup>

83 Interview with survivor S.

84 Interview with survivor E.

85 See note 72.

86 Interview with survivor AB. This incident inspired the title of the present report.

87 Interview with survivor L.

Torture against prisoners was also used randomly and collectively:

One summer day, [former] employees of Colony no. 7 together with the Russian military came to us. They were wearing masks. They came under the pretext of a search. But there was no search as such.

We were ordered to pack up our belongings and taken to the exercise yard. There, our belongings were poured on the ground, and they trampled on them. I had the Quran in my hands. They snatched it from my hands and threw it on the ground. Then we were put with stretched legs against the wall. And they hit my legs, buttocks, back, kidneys and liver, head. They beat me with batons, kicks and hands. They asked about my criminal record and my informal status in prison.

In general, they beat for no particular reason. For some non-sense or minor violations. And if one person violated something, they beat everyone in the cell.<sup>88</sup>

### **Holoprystanska Colony no. 7, Kherson region**

The administration of the colony appointed by the Russian authorities used torture to maintain discipline:

– [First], we were beaten by the employees... They could take us to the duty unit and beat us with rubber sticks for not liking the answer to the question they asked. If a person was in a disciplinary cell, he was beaten very hard there. When beating, they were shouting: "We will show you Europe!"<sup>89</sup>

### **Snihurivska Colony no. 5, Mykolaiv region**

This prison is a centralized prison hospital for ill prisoners. Many prisoners from it were ultimately transferred to Russia so we were not able to conduct multiple interviews about what happened with them. However, we managed to interview in detail one prisoner who was released in Russia and returned to Ukraine. He described the situation in this prison before the transfer:

– The food got worse. There was a lack of products. They had to be delivered from Mykolaiv. For this reason, the special diet [for ill prisoners] was cancelled. Food was cooked on the fire, as there was no electricity. Water was brought to us in a fire truck. So that we do not freeze, we were given 'burjuikas' [Ukrainian: wood burning metal stoves]. We burnt wood. ...

One prisoner died in May. He was buried right in the workshop zone [of the prison]. The Russians did not allow the removal of the corpse.

Until 28 May, security in Colony no. 5 did not change and the institution was under Ukrainian leadership. And on 28 May, everything changed.

The morning began as usual. But there were only three employees of the colony on the shift. We had breakfast. And then DPNK [main duty officer], Bodya, came and told us to get together as there would be an evacuation. ...

Russian soldiers appeared. In the fifth dorm, where the most seriously ill patients were kept, they threw a stun grenade and fired a machine gun into the ceiling. I was in the third dorm. The Russian military also came in and ordered us in a very aggressive manner and with swearing that we had to quickly ran out of the dorms and get into the car. The worse waited for all life prisoners. They were beaten and hooded. When they were led, 'they did not touch the ground.' [they were uninterruptedly beaten] To be honest, even now remembering those events, I feel uncomfortable.<sup>90</sup>

### **Mariupol pre-trial detention center, Donetsk region**

One of the prisoners in this center was a foreign student Gusein Abdullaiev. The Russian military detained Gusein at the check point when he was trying to leave Mariupol. After that, he was taken to the Mariupol pre-trial detention center where he was tortured daily for 20 days to obtain a confession that he was a member of the Azov Assault Brigade (Battalion "Azov").

– They took me to a torture chamber. This was a little room, there was an iron chair and an electric shock torture machine. They put me down and tied my hands. They began to ask questions. First, they exerted psychological pressure trying to force me to admit that I was a soldier of the 'Battalion "Azov"'. I insisted I was a student...

88 Interview with survivor P.

89 Interview with survivor C.

90 Interview with survivor BC.

They threatened me that if I didn't want to speak voluntarily, they would force me to. They attached the machine to my big toes and began to release painful shocks. They wanted me to confess to being in the military...

Every day [I was tortured]. 21 March was my birthday, and I was tortured all day. That torture was suspended only 5-6 days before an agreement was reached and I was released. They no longer tortured me with electric shocks, but they continued to beat me... As a rule, 10-15 people were beaten at once. But this is not the worst thing, I was more afraid of electric shocks.

As a rule, electric torture lasted 20-30 minutes, and the beatings lasted for an hour. The torture was repeated three times a day. It happened that I lost consciousness, cold water was poured on me, and they continued to abuse me...

With me in captivity were Sergey Nazarov - major of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Mariupol, Edik Krostov - an employee of one of the factories, Alexey Lustov - a volunteer.

They were abused even worse. Especially the volunteer. Because the guy had a tattoo on his leg, they beat him so that his leg was very swollen. He had heart problems, a [heart] attack began, I tried to help him, after which I was beaten even harder.

As a rule, they did not hit in the face, but for some reason this did not apply to Edik Krostov. When we saw him, there was no uninjured place on him. And on the body of Sergei Nazarov, electric shocks were constantly applied and filmed on video.

One day, they pointed an automatic gun at me and threatened me. First, they put it to my head and then to my knee, threatening that I would be disabled for the rest of my life. They were screaming that they would shoot me right away if I didn't confess...<sup>91</sup>

### **Prymorska Colony no. 145 (former Berdiansk Colony no. 77), Zaporizhzhia region**

Similar to other prisons, this institution was also used for detaining civilians and Ukrainian prisoners of war. One detainee who was placed in this prison recalls:

– I heard a female soldier being raped. This lasted for about three days. Then I couldn't hear her anymore and I don't know what happened with her...

Once we were taken to execution. We were all lined up, all had masks on our faces, and people were taken away to some room one by one. I felt that there were fewer people near me. Shots were heard. I was one of the last from the line and with each shot, I felt like there were fewer people beside me.

When I was brought in [a room], they threw a grenade under my feet. This was repeated several times, but I already realized that they were doing it for fun. The new ones were afraid. When we were taken to execution for the first time, I already died in my thoughts.<sup>92</sup>

Another resident of Berdiansk was taken to this prison because he was a retired Ukrainian prosecutor. He recalls:

– I was placed in a cell where a former colleague of mine, a prosecutor, was held. He was badly beaten. First days they didn't touch me. Then came a policeman whom I knew well. Once he was caught in corruption, and to escape from punishment, he agreed to cooperate with the occupiers. He organized the torture...

We were electrocuted, beaten in such a way that I don't want to mention it... But this was hell... They put a bag on my head, took me to a 'torture chamber' and mocked me...

We heard heart-breaking screams every evening and during the night. Once the screams suddenly stopped and then they carried the corpse of a man next to us...

They tortured like this: At first, they asked why you did not switch to the side of the 'young republic', and then they were interested only in material values that could be seized...

I stayed in the Colony no. 77 for 33 days. The hostages were guarded by the Dagestanis, and all the others were locals or employees of the FSB of Russia. Soldiers from Azov [Ukrainian battalion] were held in one wing of the prison, and we, [former] law enforcement officers, were held in the other.

91 "Most frightening was electricity. Shocking interview of student Hussein Abdullayev who was liberated from the Russian captivity". Interview by Media.Az: <https://media.az/politics/1067856587/teryal-soznanie-na-menya-vylyvali-holodnyu-vodu-i-prodolzhali-pytat-intervyu-s-azerbaydzhanskim-studentom/>

92 "They were taking me to an execution": story of captivity of Dmytro Rashkevych, a soldier from Odesa region: <https://usonline.com/mene-vyvodyly-na-rozstril-rozpoivid-pro-polon-vijskovoho-z-odeshchyny-dmytra-rashkevycha/>

On 24 May, I was transported to the Berdiansk [police] detention center. It was even worse there: there were 16 of us in a 4-person cell. Torture continued.<sup>93</sup>

A local journalist, anonymously, recalled:

– People who left Berdiansk Colony were surprised that the Moscow Nazis brought with them not only ceremonial uniforms, but also instruments for torture. ... they had special electrical appliances to carry out torture with electricity. They brought with them a Stalinist equipment of 1937...<sup>94</sup>

### Police establishments

Upon liberation of parts of the NGCA of Ukraine, we started to receive numerous reports about the use of police stations for detaining and torturing civilians. Initial information on such violations appeared in public reports of the Ukrainian law enforcement and other authorities. It was followed by public testimonies of victims who were held in police stations or other police-related facilities like police administration buildings.

Civilians were illegally arrested and detained in police premises for prolonged periods of time, sometimes exceeding three months. During this time, Russian officials tortured detainees to extract information about their relatives, friends and other acquaintances that were suspected of connections with or served in the Ukrainian army. Torture was also used against random civilians to extract any information relevant for them, to intimidate them and to coerce to certain actions. In many instances torture was used to punish civilians for their pro-Ukrainian position, for example expressed through social media in support of the Ukrainian independence or against the Russian invasion. A significant number of survivors were targeted because of their former service in the Ukrainian army, employment with Ukrainian state authorities, especially the law enforcement authorities.

The testimonies and information that we have collected point out to the common use of brutal methods of torture in police stations, such as electric shocks through genitalia. In many cases, the perpetrators wore masks and/or used nick names to disguise their identity.

## Kharkiv region

### Balaklia Police Department, Kharkiv Oblast

After the liberation of Balaklia, the Ukrainian police authorities released official information about more than 40 persons who were held in the basement of the local police station and in a neighbouring building. According to the authorities, witnesses provided information that various types of torture were used against civilians, in particular electric shocks. Torture was used to identify those who had relatives in the Ukrainian military as well as supporters of the Ukrainian state<sup>95</sup>.

One of the 40 tortured persons was a local resident Artem:

– There was a search. They came to my house. My brother serves in the [Ukrainian] army. They took me there [to the police station]. 45 days they did not touch me. However, other people were taken for torturing. They used electricity. There was a ventilation system. When it was turned on, people's screams were not heard. ...

[Once] they took me to a cell. I was given two wires from a telephone. They turned it up and it released over 100 volts. The faster you turn it, the higher the electricity output is. He was turning me and ordering me not to leave the wires. He said that if I left them, they'd kill me. He started to ask me about former servicemen who remained in the town, in Balaklia. ...

They were two. One of them wore a mask. The other – I'll recognize him if I see him. ... I was interrogated only once. Others were taken out [for interrogation] every other day. It depended on our luck. ... I regularly heard screams. They also used electricity against women. ... We were 7 persons in a cell of 1.5 x 3 meters.<sup>96</sup>

Another survivor, Oleksandr, described how Russian servicemen in masks tortured him with electricity, beat his head by a baseball bat, burnt him, and cut his ear and nose by knife. They forced him to sign a document confessing about his cooperation with the Ukrainian armed forces. Torture was filmed for unknown reasons. Oleksandr thinks

93 45 days of hell. Interview by the NGO "Human Rights Group "SICH": <https://sich-pravo.org/45-dniv-pekla/>

94 A city of terror. What's happening in Berdiansk and in its main torture chamber – prison no. 77. <https://mipl.org.ua/misto-teroru-shho-vidbuvayetsya-v-okupovano-mu-berdyansku-i-jogo-golovnij-kativni-koloniji-%E2%84%96-77/>

95 Sergiy Bolvinov, Head of Investigations Department in Kharkiv region, interview by Suspilne: <https://suspilne.media/281847-kativna-grabezi-ruini-so-zalisili-posobi-rosijski-okupanti-v-balaklii/>

96 Torture chamber, robberies, ruins: what the Russian invaders left behind in Balaklia Suspilne: <https://suspilne.media/281847-kativna-grabezi-ruini-so-zalisili-posobi-rosijski-okupanti-v-balaklii/>

that videos could have been made either for watching it later ‘for pleasure’ or for having compromising materials against fellow servicemen to blackmail them and force to comply with future military orders.<sup>97</sup>

### Kupiansk District Police Department, Kharkiv region

The Kupiansk police station was also used by Russian servicemen to torture local civilians. They used torture by electricity and beating. They also humiliated detainees, for example by forcing them to sing Russian songs.

The below event took place on 7 March 2022 and continued later. A local police officer who examined the Kupiansk police station premises after the liberation by the Ukrainian armed forces described the signs of torture by the Russian servicemen found in the station:

– Those anti-gas masks that we found [in the police station] were covered in blood, they were covered in blood inside. This is such a [terrible] torture. They could close their [victims’] breathing.<sup>98</sup>



Anti-gas mask used for torturing civilians in Kupiansk, Kharkiv region. The letter ‘Z’ is used by Russians as a symbol of Russia’s war on Ukraine. Photo by Dumka.media

Ms. Zhanna Volzhyna talked about her relative who was detained in this police station for one month:

– They were abused, they were tortured with electric shocks, they connected wires to their genitals, to their ears. When we [relatives of the detainees] were standing, waiting to pass a parcel to them, we could hear screams.<sup>99</sup>

Vadym Kutsenko served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and had stopped by the end of 2021, before the full-scale invasion. In May 2022, he was arrested by the Russian soldiers and detained in the local police station. There he was held for 110 days. Vadym described the detention and torture in one of our public interviews:

97 Post on the Facebook page of the Ukrainian Ombudsman, Dmytro Lubinets, published on 15 Dec 2022. The post also contains video testimonies of Oleksandr: <https://www.facebook.com/dmytro.lubinets/posts/pfbid03576HMnvdNm4L3tAu1UL27ijXyyqZF7qD8Hn5RNny3LhELa9NbzjXmNtduosxcXENI>

98 A correspondent of TSN saw a torture chamber on her own eyes. Interview by TSN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqpxJ6Xg-6s&t=78s>

99 Ibid.



– They took me to the Kupiansk district police department. First, they placed me in cell no. 10. I was met 'wonderfully' with a pipe from the heating system. Just over a meter long pipe. Metal-plastic. And an officer's belt with a buckle. That was the beginning. In the next couple of days, they used electricity.

They connected the electrodes you know where... One electrode on the ear, the other 'below the abdomen.' The feelings were like this—I could not see anything for a day and a half. Others were hung by handcuffs behind their back. In the same cell was a horizontal bar... The guys [cellmates] trembled so much that they fainted. Constant obscenities. Screams were terrible. I have never heard such screams that I heard in the early days of being there. There [the guards] were Luhansk residents: Zhenya, Vova and Vitaliy ...

Cell no. 10 was double. There were nine of us there. ... Military doctors came, they 'pumped up' [helped to regain consciousness] those who were already 'on the verge.' ...

There were such cases that they forgot to close the 'feeders' [hole in the cell door]. It was easy to see that a person was being carried. ... [sometimes] three, four persons carried [the tortured] people on bed sheets...<sup>100</sup>

Another local resident who was held in this police station recalls:

– The cells were overcrowded. In my cell alone, a cell for 4 persons, there were 19 to 25 persons... I was kept there for many days, up to one month. Out of 25 persons [in the cell], 5 - 6 persons were shackled. ... they were handcuffed in a standing position to a horizontal bar and every evening we were put face to the wall, and they were beaten...

[It happened because] one of them tore down a Russian flag, the second shouted somewhere at the checkpoint: "Glory to Ukraine!", the third served in the Ukrainian army in the past... Their legs were so swollen that when their shackles were removed five days later for several hours they kept falling and just couldn't walk. They just laid down on the floor. Then they were handcuffed again, and they stood again for several days...

We fed them [the handcuffed cellmates] from a spoon. They were not allowed to eat. We shared what we were given ourselves.<sup>101</sup>

Another citizen of Kupiansk spoke about his prolonged detention in the police station:<sup>102</sup>

– They took me away for 2.5 months and put me in this place where we used to have the police. There were cells, 14 cells, like a jail, I changed a lot of cells in 2.5 months.

They threatened me with execution, took me to the forest, shot over my head. They tried to beat some information out of me... Every day there was intimidation and beating with sticks, electro shockers, and plastic pipes. Regularly, every day. If you keep quiet, you get a little, and if you don't keep quiet, you can get beaten every hour until you shut up...

They forced us to learn the Russian anthem. Every evening, our captors walked down the corridor and said: "Prison, on the count of three, everybody sings the Russian anthem"... If a cell didn't sing, it was immediately opened, and everyone got a 'full treatment' ...

The Ukrainian soldiers who fought in 2015-16 were taken to an 'exercise yard' [outside of the police station], and held there for up to 10 days, freezing.

Vitaliy Chernov was also taken by the Russian servicemen to this police station on 2 September 2022. He was detained because he was a school director and refused to cooperate with the occupying authorities in terms of continuing the education process. We spoke with Vitaliy in a public interview:

– [In the police station] they took away laces, keys, money and, worst of all, glasses. My vision was minus 10 [dioptries]...

I was placed in the so-called 'exercise cell'. There was no roof. Usually, detainees were taken there for a walk. When I walked in, I saw a guy who had a trash bag on his head tied with duct tape. Only a small slit remained around his mouth. When he was asked, "Why are you wrapped in the bag? Take it off!". He answered, "If I take the bag off, I'll be finished off." Once, that bag moved on him. The guard pulled the guy out of the cell, beat him with a dub, put the bag over his head again and said: "If you take it off, I'll kill you for real!"

100 *110 days in a torture chamber – ATO soldier speaks about torture in Kupiansk isolator of temporary detention:* <https://khpg.org/1608811718>

101 *Collaborators from Kupiansk and how occupants tortured Ukrainians.* Interview by Butusov Plus: <https://youtu.be/sFfhEcuNjzo>

102 *Atrocities in Kharkiv region: abducted people, torture chambers and 6-meter hole from a bomb.* Interview by BIHUS INFO: <https://youtu.be/o8wlgdXQDG8?t=1248>

During the day it was up to 30 degrees Celsius, and at night only 6. I was wearing a T-shirt and jeans. It was hot during the day, and very cold at night. The first day was fine, but it was impossible to sleep, the concrete floor was cold. You could take a nap by squatting, leaning on the wall, and putting a plastic bottle between the cold wall and the back.

On the second night, it rained. Over part of the cell, a plastic cloth was thrown on the ceiling bars. And we spent the night under that cloth ...

I said: "I don't know anyone. As the war began, I only stayed at home and in my garden – I didn't go anywhere else."

I had to say at least something, because if you don't say anything, – on the little fingers were electrodes – they started electric shocks... As soon as he didn't like something, he immediately shocked me. I said the word "war" and was punished with a shock [because]: "It's not a war, but a special operation"<sup>103!</sup><sup>104</sup>

### Police station no. 1 (Shevchenkove), Kharkiv region

A local resident Yaroslava was held for three days in a cell of this police station. There she was beaten with a rubber truncheon by her former school friend from the same village. She was also demanded to provide information about residents who were former Ukrainian soldiers. All three days she was given neither water nor food. Under threats against her children, she was forced to perform a 'community service' for 30 days after release, during which she fed prisoners at a local police station:

– He told me, "If tomorrow at 8 am you do not come for the community service, you have three children - think about what will happen [to them] then".<sup>105</sup>

Mayor of the Shevchenko community, Valeriy Prykhodko, describes the findings in this station after the liberation:

– When I came there on 10 September and went around it together with the law enforcement, I saw blood in the police building.

I know they took people away for 60 days, forced them to work. I received papers signed by [the local] collaborators: "I ask you to give me two persons for such and such work." That is, they used people as slaves.

I know that they were tortured by electricity. It happened that women were beaten, although usually they were only pressured psychologically. For example, they were not allowed to go to the toilet, verbally threatened.<sup>106</sup>

Journalists also found that, according to the residents detained at the police station, this station was overseen by Vitaliy Mikhailov, who worked in the police before the occupation. Those policemen who refused to cooperate were tortured. For example, a senior local policeman was hung and tortured by the Russian servicemen.<sup>107</sup>

### Izium Central Police Station, Kharkiv region

The Izium Central Police Station was a key administration unit for the Russian armed forces during their occupation. Human Rights Watch interviewed five men who said they were held and tortured there. Below follow the quotes from these interviews.<sup>108</sup>

103 Russia named the war on Ukraine a 'Special Military Operation'. In Russia, using the word 'war' in relation to the war on Ukraine can lead to an official prosecution.

104 "Your wife will be placed in the neighboring cell, and your son – in colony in Belgorod." In Kharkiv region, the occupiers tortured a school director. Interview by Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group: <https://khpg.org/1608811339>

105 "I did not know that it would be a prison": confession in SIZO and the 'Russian world' in Kharkiv region. Interview by Skhemy: <https://youtu.be/w0u5rFsEI08?t=343>

106 "Write to Putin and ask for help". How they resisted occupiers in Shevchenkove: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/okupatsija-vojenni-zlotchiny-shevchenkove/32199391.html>

107 "I did not know that it would be a prison": confession in SIZO and the 'Russian world' in Kharkiv region. Interview by Skhemy: <https://youtu.be/w0u5rFsEI08?t=343>

108 Ukraine: Russian Forces Tortured Izium Detainees. Survivors Describe Beatings, Electric Shocks, Waterboarding. Interviews by Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees>



A cell in Izium Central Police Station which Russian forces used to detain people, 23 September 2022. © 2022 Belkis Wille/Human Rights Watch

All five men said they were taken almost every day to the basement, where they were interrogated and tortured. Two said that their captors forced gas masks over their faces when their screams became too loud. Researchers found five gas masks in a large room that used to be a shooting gallery, in the basement the police station.



Gas masks left in the basement of Izium Central Police Station, where Russian forces detained and tortured people. 23 September 2022. © 2022 Belkis Wille/Human Rights Watch

Taras, 31 years old and a builder, said that on 19 or 20 August, two Russian soldiers stopped him at a checkpoint, took him to his house, and searched it. When they found there bullet casings that he had collected, three soldiers took him into the police station.

– They took me to one of the offices inside and beat me on and off for three hours, one with a metal rod and the other with a plastic pipe while they demanded that I give them the names of residents who were in the Territorial Defence Forces.<sup>109</sup> ... They even put a gun to my head and threatened to shoot me unless I gave names.<sup>110</sup>

109 Self-organized units of civilian residents who volunteered to protect their communities, notably in the beginning of the Russia's invasion in Ukraine.

110 *Ukraine: Russian Forces Tortured Izium Detainees. Survivors Describe Beatings, Electric Shocks, Waterboarding.* Interviews by Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees>

Yura, 46 years old and working for an energy operation, said Russian forces held him at the central police station for a week in late August. He said that a Ukrainian veteran was in the prison cell below him and prisoners were passing each other cigarettes from one floor to the next through windows of their cells. He said: "one day the man called up to him asking for a cigarette, saying it would be his last because soldiers were going to kill him." Yura said: "A short while later, he heard a door open and a gunshot ring out, and he never heard the man's voice again."<sup>111</sup>

Maksym, another resident of Izyum, was also tortured in the basement of the local police station. He was released when the city was liberated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. He spoke with Ukrainian journalists:

– The first two days I was tortured, but they didn't say anything. They electrocuted me and to all my questions: "For what?" the answer was: "Answer yourself! You know! Speak!"<sup>112</sup>

– We were put on a chair and chained. Electrodes were attached to the hands, that's it. This is such a thing... Then they put on a gas mask. Well, after that I lost consciousness. Then I don't remember...<sup>113</sup>

Oleksandr Glushko was also taken to the basement of the police station. He was released and then taken back again:

– Again a bag on my head. I asked them, "Let me at least put on my pants." I was wearing underpants and a T-shirt. They didn't let me. Later, one of the local guys on duty at the station, a collaborator, brought me clothes because it quickly got cold. He fed us. ... They beat me with their hands less, but tortured [more] with electric shocks – two shockers landed on me.<sup>114</sup>

Mikhailo Chendei was held in the station for 12 days and tortured. Consequently, one of his arms was broken:

– One Russian held it [an arm], another hit it with a stick. An open fracture, my hand was hanging... When they enter the cell, you must turn your back and stand against the wall while they put a bag or mask on your head, damn knows what.

Those who tortured me were five, they chattered in pure Russian. One of them wanted to break my other arm, but the other told him, "One is enough" ...

My legs turned blue and swollen. They shot over my head 20 times. They put a firearm muzzle into my ear and mouth. In the morning, they came to the cells and did 'exercises': they beat us.<sup>115</sup>

## Kherson region

### Police Temporary Detention Facility, Kherson region

In the Temporary Detention Facility (ITT)<sup>116</sup>, Russian servicemen tortured civilians and other detainees with electric shocks, beatings and psychological pressure to obtain the information they wanted:

– Their favourite fun was wires connected to the ears or on other parts of the body and electric shocks. It is called 'sunshine'. When the wires are connected to the ears and supply electricity, apparently, the eyes can fall out. [Electricity] through the genitals, through the chest electric shocks were [also] used. This happened during interrogations. At night, they were sure to wake up everyone and force us to sing the [Russian] anthem, or some Russian slogans. ...

Terrible cries were heard all day. Both men and women were tortured. After a day, I was taken to an 'interview', and before that they took fingerprints. They broke my arm, pressed it hard...

And then they connected two electrodes to my genitals, a dynamo, 300 volts. Hair straight, of course, screams, and then they said: "Recollect!". Then he turned the power a little down. My whole body trembled. And then he turned it up again and said [again]: "Recollect!". Turned up again and again. [He also hit me] with a baton.<sup>117</sup>

111 Ibid.

112 *Torture chamber in Izyum. People were taken away and never returned.* Interview by ICTV: <https://youtu.be/l82AfzP4lok?t=588>

113 Ibid.

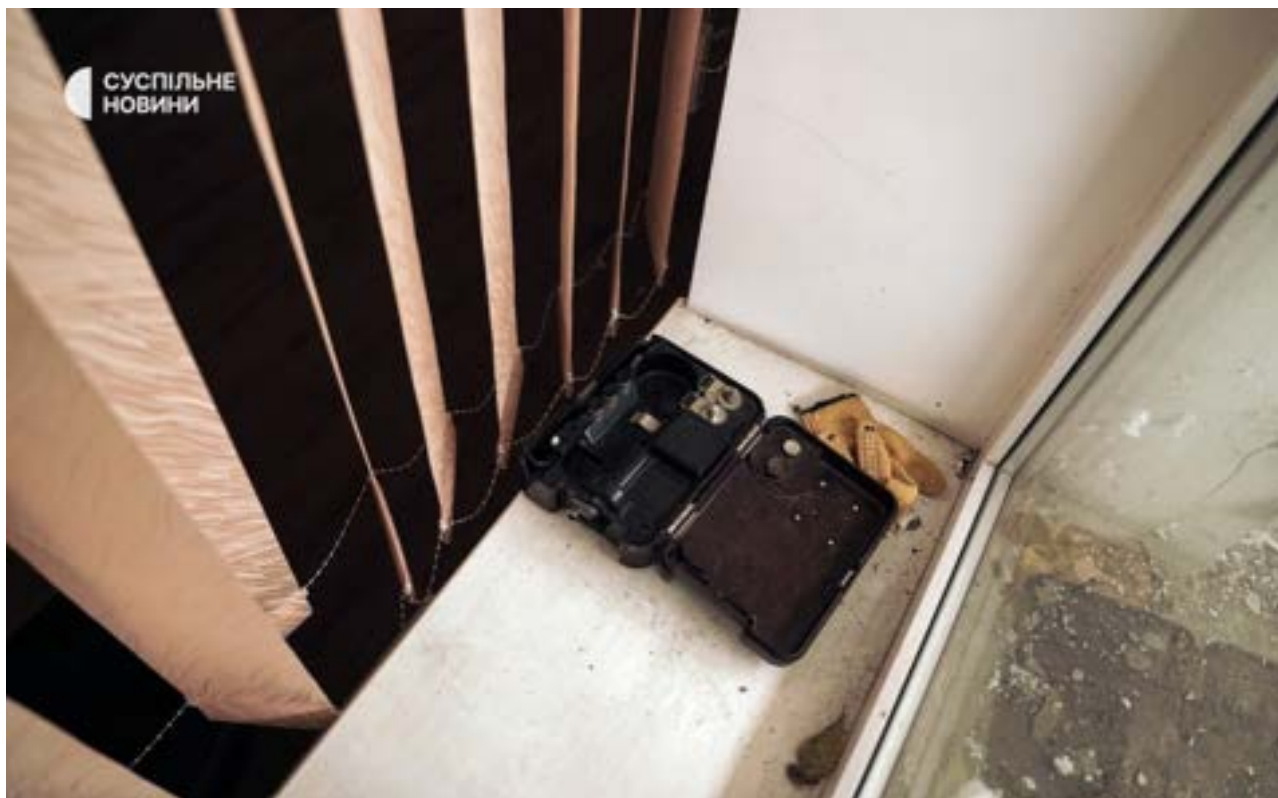
114 "Do you need a corpse?": a report from the Izyum hospital, where hundreds of civilians were rescued during the occupation, including those almost tortured to death by Russians. Interview by Zmina: <https://zmina.info/articles/vam-trup-potriben-reportazh-z-likarni-izyuma-de-za-chas-okupacziji-vryatuvaly-sotni-czyvilnyh-zokrema-majzhe-zakatovanyh-rosiyanamy/>

115 Ibid.

116 See note 5.

117 "They beat both men and women". What Kherson residents say about captivity during the Russian occupation. Interview by Radio Svoboda: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovya-khersonshchyna-katuvannya-voyenni-zlochyny/32137870.html>

Kherson Regional Prosecutor's Office estimated that around 500 persons have gone through the Temporary Detention Facility in Kherson.<sup>118</sup>



'Topic' — a military field telephone that the Russian military could have used to torture with electric shock in the Temporary Detention Facility, Kherson, 14 November 2022. Photo by Taras Ibragimov/Suspilne.

### Kahovka

A policeman from the village of Velyka Oleksandrivka was taken to the police station in Kahovka:

– They started convincing me to collaborate with them. They said that I was strong. I said that I didn't like to work in the police and wanted to retire. ... in my cell all detainees were there for having tattoos. ... One guy had a 'German cross' on his shoulder. He was told that if he managed to remove it over the night, everything would be fine. If not, all detainees in the cell would have to suffer. ... He said: "guys, I don't want to cause you trouble." ... We found a piece of a stationery knife. Some of us held him. And we cut the tattoo out while he was awake.<sup>119</sup>

### Zaporizhzhia region

Few reports are available from Zaporizhzhia region. Unlike Kyiv, Kherson or Kharkiv region, it has not been liberated from the Russian occupation, which complicated documentation of the situation in police stations. However, some residents who were tortured in police stations managed to move to the GCA of Ukraine and tell their stories.

### The village of Ozerne

Oleksandr Fursa was the head of the enterprise located on the territory of Veselivskiy Correctional Center no. 8 of the penitentiary system. After the occupation, Oleksandr continued to work until 30 September when the illegal referenda staged by the Russian servicemen took place.

After a few days, Russian soldiers came to his house and took him to the local police station:

– Armed people came to my house. They segregated my wife from me, took me to the house, and checked our belongings. Then they put me on the ground, started kicking me, asked me why I stopped working. ...

I was [arrested and] taken to a cell ... There were loudspeakers next to each cell, and the music played the whole day. Mornings began with the anthem of Russia, and then anything [any other music] was played. This was done so that no screams could be heard. But sometimes they did such things that the music did not help.<sup>120</sup>

118 Ibid.

119 *Liberated Kherson region: giving birth in a basement and torture. Testimonies.* Interview by BIHUS Info: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN7ui-VBEX8&t=250s>

120 Interview with survivor CD.

### **Berdiansk**

A Ukrainian prisoner of war was detained in the local police station. He recalls various types of torture used against him:

– They used different types of torture: I was tied up, my legs were tied to the legs of an iron chair, and my hands were back, handcuffed. They turned on the wires and electrocuted me. They also used rubber truncheons, pulled a bag over my head, strangled. I lost consciousness three times.

The first time I quickly regained consciousness, and next time, when I regained consciousness, I realized that my tooth was knocked out, and my nose was broken. I asked them why they were doing this? And they began to tell memorized stories about the castration used against their military. ...

Once they pulled pants off me, they started tying something to my genitals. I thought they would move 'from words to deeds' and that it was a tourniquet so I wouldn't die of bleeding. How glad I was when I realized that it was just electricity!<sup>121</sup>

## **II) UNOFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION**

Establishing improvised torture chambers was one of the first administrative decisions of the Russian occupying power, followed closely thereafter by stamping out any opposition to their rule. Such places were, in several instances, found upon liberation of occupied cities, towns and even some villages.

Our findings suggest that this was a routine practice in all places occupied by the Russian forces. The detention places were mostly basements of individual houses and official institutions (e.g. police stations, schools, hospitals, railway stations). They also included other places such as garages, factories, agricultural compounds, or other premises. Torture and other ill-treatment in unofficial places of detention were often accompanied by other human rights violations such as unlawful detention and extrajudicial executions.

The collected materials demonstrate that Russian armed forces raided the captured cities to identify civilians who held a pro-Ukrainian position, former Ukrainian soldiers, law enforcement and other officers, civil servants and teachers, activists and volunteers who supported civilians during the hostilities. The main criterion for 'selection' was support of the Ukrainian statehood and authorities.

### **Donetsk region**

#### **The village of Bezimenne, Novoazovsk district**

The event took place between 1 and 31 March 2022. Vadym, a 53 years old civil servant in Mariupol, was subjected to a *filtering* procedure when he wanted to leave the city. Russian soldiers took away his wife after they saw that she liked the page of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on Facebook. The man tried to stop the Russians, but they beat him. They also took him away for further torture. He recalls:

– They used electricity. I almost died. I fell and choked on my dental fillings, which had come out from my teeth.

Because of the brutal torture, at some point, he vomited:

– They were furious. When I regained consciousness, they told me to clean everything up and continued to give me electric shocks.<sup>122</sup>

### **Kyiv region**

#### **The village of Motyzhyn**

At the end of March 2022, the Russian soldiers kept two residents of Motyzhyn village in a sewage hole next to a house. One of them, Oleg, survived the detention:

– They put me sitting in a dwell carcass. During the first day I could still stand up. Later, I could not do that. ... When they took me out, I could not walk, and they dragged me while I was blindfolded.

<sup>121</sup> "They were taking me to an execution": story of captivity of Dmytro Rashkevych, a soldier from Odesa region. <https://usonline.com/mene-vyvodyly-na-rozstril-rozpovid-pro-polon-vijskovoho-z-odeshchyny-dmytra-rashkevycha/>

<sup>122</sup> "The Russians said beatings were my re-education". Interview by BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61683513?fbclid=IwAR1WpyFARKnm6QsASCJmLX-lpuq13McSwOyLecnxnoVBw4-h-Lr96DzubHs>

In addition, the Russian soldiers tortured him outside:

– They first put me on the ground. One of them was shooting next to my head, another started to shoot between my legs, with each shot getting closer and closer [to the genitalia].

The other local citizen was tortured and executed after the Russian soldier found a picture of a Russian military convoy on his phone. The soldiers had nicknames 'Vitebsk' and 'Kaluga'.<sup>123</sup>



The sewage hole where Oleg was detained. After liberation, a body of another person who was killed was found in it (mannequin was left in his place).

## Kharkiv region

### Izium

Human Rights Watch described several cases of torture found in a local polyclinic which stopped operating as a hospital about two years prior to Russian forces arriving in the city. Based on testimonies of survivors, they identified 5 unofficial (improvised) places of detention established in Izium during its occupation by the Russian armed forces<sup>124</sup>:

- 1 City Railway Polyclinic
- 2 Secondary school no. 6
- 3 Izyum Optical and Mechanical Plant
- 4 Secondary school no. 12
- 5 Izyum water supply and sewerage enterprise

Below, we describe the findings that concern the Central Railway Polyclinic.

Eight men, interviewed separately, said that Russian forces had detained them and others in two garages next to the main building, which they occupied. Human Rights Watch visited the hospital on 22 September 2022 and inspected the garages. The two garage rooms matched the former detainees' descriptions.

All eight men said they had been tortured with electric shocks. In one room in the building, Human Rights Watch saw two electric outlets that were blackened, but it was unclear whether this resulted from the abuse. According to two

123 ["I sat in a dwell where now is a dead man's corpse". A story of a man who survived hostage. Interview by Hromadske: https://youtu.be/HPqmJA3MbU0](https://youtu.be/HPqmJA3MbU0)

124 [Ukraine: Russian Forces Tortured Izium Detainees: Survivors Describe Beatings, Electric Shocks, Waterboarding. https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees](https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees)

Ukrainian electrical engineers, sockets can blacken in this way if they overheat for example during electric shocks if the electrodes were located close to each other on the victim's body.



One of two garages in which Russian forces held men on the City Railway Polyclinic compound in Izyum, Ukraine, 22 September 2022. ©2022 Belkis Wille/ Human Rights Watch

The Washington Post interviewed a woman who said that she had been detained in the same place for 10 days in early July 2022 and subjected to electric shocks and repeated rapes, including forced oral sex.<sup>125</sup>

Bohdan, who was detained during the same period there, stated that he had heard women's screams on multiple occasions, and added that he had heard two soldiers standing outside of the garage door one day speaking: "Don't give her food, she didn't give a blow job".

When inspecting the room, Human Rights Watch saw 'Alla', the name of the woman interviewed by The Washington Post, carved into the wall. There were also other words and phrases 'electricity, undressed or raped', 'barely alive', 'murdered', 'very painful', and 'help'. She told The Washington Post that she considered trying to kill herself.

Those held in the garages said they were fed only once a day and given about 1.5 litres of water to share with up to 13 people held in the garage.

In one of the hospital rooms monitors found an emblem and the German words 'Truth Sets You Free' written on the wall in what could have been a reference to the Nazis' use of 'Work Sets You Free' – the slogan on the gate to Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. A former employee of the hospital told the monitors that the emblem and phrase appeared on the walls after Russian forces started occupying the building. The emblem could depict crossed stick grenades, which was the symbol of a German SS brigade from World War II.

125 In Russian-occupied Izyum, she was raped and tortured. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/09/izyum-rape-torture-occupation-russia/>





The German words 'Truth Sets You Free' written on the wall in one of the City Railway Polyclinic rooms, and an emblem that might depict crossed stick grenades, which was the symbol of the German SS brigade Dirlewanger from World War II. Izium, Ukraine, 22 September 2022, 2022. © 2022 Belkis Wille/ Human Rights Watch

### The village of Vesele, Izum district

Mykola, a resident of the village, was detained by the Russian officers at his home on 22 April 2022. They tied his hands and took him to a warehouse located on an industrial site and tortured him for five hours to extract information. After being tortured, he was taken to a basement in a local café, where he was held for one more day. During an interview with journalists, Mykola said the following:

– They were cruel, used cursing words, intimidated me, hit my legs. All three of them hit my legs, asking "Are you a member of the territorial defence?"<sup>126</sup>...

Mostly they hit me in the chest. After they finished, my chest was all blue. I said to them: "You'll break my ribs," they replied: "Don't worry!"... I was on my knees on rough concrete, my knees were burning...

One of them took a wooden stick and hit my leg with all his might. I cried: "You'll break it!". He laughed: "I will not." And he went on hitting me on, and on, on my lower leg...

Then they took a bucket full of water. And they took me and started to drown my head in the water. I thought that I would die then, impulsively struggled, and shrugged...

One of them took my shoes and socks off and attached wires to my toes. There was a military field telephone with an electricity generator in it. The faster you rotate a handle of this telephone, the stronger the current is. So, they started to torture me with electricity... I was very sick, not seeing anything around, in pain...<sup>127</sup>

126 Self-organized units of civilian residents who volunteered to protect their communities, notably in the beginning of the Russia's invasion in Ukraine.

127 "They knew all the information". How civilians were tortured in Kharkiv region. Interview by Butusov Plus: <https://youtu.be/H0-zP49kVHI>

### Vovchansk, Chuhuiv district

We received several reports about the Russian forces who arranged makeshift torture chambers on the territory of the Vovchansk Aggregate Plant. In a public interview, we spoke with the Deputy Director of this plant who told us the following:

– Our enterprise is subject to a special security regime. We produced military products. And therefore, we had warehouses where the products were stored before the order was shipped... In these warehouses, they created this concentration camp. These are capital insulated premises with reinforced concrete walls. Some warehouses do not have a window, they [only] have a metal door. They were used as containment chambers. Offices were used for interrogations. ...

These are different people [who were kept in the torture chambers]. These are, first, former soldiers of the Ukrainian army, patriotic-minded people, then - former law enforcement officers, representatives of authorities, local governments, teachers. Well, so you understand this list, even a priest was taken there and tortured with electricity for three days.<sup>128</sup>



Vovchansk Aggregate Plant, a chamber where some detainees were held, September 2022. Photo by Sergey Bolvinov / Suspilne.

Lidia Tilna, a school director, was kept at the plant for 19 days. For 5 days she was kept alone in a cell without food and water in a room where she was forced to sit on the concrete floor:

– I sat on the concrete floor without food and water. Then I was taken out. I thought that's all, they would kill me. They removed the bag from my head, I saw women in front of me. I was already weak, I fell ... One of them was also a school director.<sup>129</sup>

At this plant, the Russians also held seven foreign students from Sri Lanka. Six men were kept separately, a woman was kept alone. They were beaten, forced to clean the toilets and premises used by the Russian soldiers. Below are the testimonies which the students provided to various journalists.

– Every day we were cleaning toilets and bathrooms. Some days Russians came and beat our people, our Sri Lanka people.<sup>130</sup>

– Every day they gave us the opportunity to go to the restroom for two minutes. There was a shower every five days. For two minutes. They fed us very little. Twice a week in small portions... We didn't even think of escaping from captivity. They had a lot of weapons, machine guns. They put guns to our bodies, beat us with machine guns. They beat us, but they didn't treat us. There was no medicine.<sup>131</sup>

128 In a plant in Vovchansk the Russians tortured with electricity even a priest. Interview by Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group: <https://khpg.org/1608810929>

129 19 days in captivity. The terrible story of a director from Kharkiv region. Interview by 24 kanal: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIA\\_v-iKeTc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIA_v-iKeTc)

130 Sri Lankans describe abuse as Russian captives in Ukraine. Interviews by Aljazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/25/sri-lankans-describe-abuse-as-russian-captives-in-ukraine>

131 They pulled nails by pliers, fed twice a week: occupiers kept hostages 7 citizens of Sri Lanka in Kharkiv region. Interview by Suspilne: <https://suspilne.media/283029-bogdan-2/>

– They took our passports, other documents, phones, clothes, and locked us up in a room. There were also Ukrainian people with us, and they were questioned and sent away in 10 days, 15 days or one month. With us, they never spoke, because they could not understand our language. Most of the time we could not understand what they [Russians] told us and we were beaten for that.<sup>132</sup>

– They beat me, beat me. I don't know why. Every morning. They pulled me by the skin and said: let's go, let's go. Every day. What was the problem - I don't know.<sup>133</sup>

– They hit me across the body many times with their guns. One of them punched me in the stomach and I was in pain for two days. He then asked me for money.<sup>134</sup>

The woman who was kept separately recalls:

– They used to beat us when we went to take a shower. They didn't even allow me to meet the others. We were stuck inside for three months. Being alone, I was so tense. They said I was having mental health issues and gave me tablets. But I didn't take them.<sup>135</sup>

The detainees also complained of other types of torture. For example, one of them reported that his nails from the big toes were pulled by pliers.<sup>136</sup>

### Kozacha Lopan, Kharkiv district

The event took place on 22 March 2022. Vitaliy, a local citizen who had formerly served in the Ukrainian army before the full-scale invasion, was detained by Russian soldiers in the local railway station. The railway station was also used to detain other local citizens. Vitaliy recalls:

– I was brought to the railway station. They pulled me out of the car and put me against the wall. Next to me there was a soldier with a truncheon. I saw how he was trembling from adrenalin. When he hit my neck, I fell. Then people started to run to me from all sides. I covered my head by hands. They were hitting me and saying: "Greetings from Donbass"<sup>137</sup>.

From the beating two ribs cracked at once under my heart. A few more - behind and on the right.

They took me up, gave me a cigarette and dragged me ... up the stairs to the second floor. I could not walk on my own, so they began to take me by the hand to different rooms. ...

I remember, when they brought me to the room, I made three or four steps from the entrance - and they started beating me again. I fell. They were kicking me. I shouted that I had an inguinal hernia<sup>138</sup>, and if they continued, I would die on the spot.

They asked me to show it. I pulled off my pants, underwear, and turned to them to show it. Instead, they fastened something like a clothespin to my genitals, and put a piece of thick heavy wire on my thigh. ...

Then I understood what would follow. When electricity was turned on, I felt as if hot metal or cold nitrogen was being poured through my genitals, or both. ...

They were burning me with electricity until one of their soldiers came in. He said: "Oh, have a look, all is burning on him, there is smoke."

They laughed and started pouring water on me. Not to put the fire out, but to make the electricity flow better. ...

I started hitting my head on the floor. I wanted to break my head and die. Torture with electricity was beyond the limit, I could not stand it. ...

132 Ibid, note 130.

133 Ibid, note 131.

134 *Sri Lankans freed from Russian brutality in Ukraine*. Interview by BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62948148>

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid, note 131.

137 Meaning from the parts of Donbass occupied in 2014-2015 and administered by Russia through the so-called 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Luhansk People's Republic'.

138 An inguinal hernia is a protrusion of the abdominal muscles by a tissue, such as the intestine.

Then they put some rags under my head and said, if I continued, I would be electrocuted until my heart stopped.

I screamed, gasped, I lacked air.<sup>139</sup>

Around 100 people were detained in that railway station:

– There were already a whole bunch of ATO<sup>140</sup> veterans there, they took everyone in one day so that no one had time to escape and hide...They took me down to the basement, threw me on foam plastic, I felt that there were a lot of people there. ...

The basement was small. There was a lot of people. Some were silent, some were screaming, some were crying, because they were all heavily beaten ... with my hands tied, I sat there until the evening and heard these tortures, how people were electrocuted, how they were beaten, how 'correspondents' asked questions...

There were some people who burned their legs with acid, wrapped them with plastic wrap because if they [the Russians] saw the tattoos, it would be much worse for them...<sup>141</sup>

### The village of Cherkasky Tyshky

In the garage of a local enterprise, the Russian armed forces gathered persons whom they considered dangerous for their occupation administration. The detainees were taken for interrogation every day. They were beaten and electrocuted to obtain information about pro-Ukrainian residents and former Ukrainian soldiers.

Vitaliy Ilchenko, a local resident, described his detention:

– In one room, 20 people sat on wooden pallets. I froze my toes and nails on the toes, at night the temperature dropped to -15 °C.<sup>142</sup>

Another resident, Olexandr Teslenko, described how he was tortured:

The electro shocker was so big, it was white. The first time I did not fall, the second time it got a little worse. And then, as they put some water at the beginning of my spine and shocked me again, my leg shook.<sup>143</sup>



Enterprise 'Slavutych' in the village of Cherkassy Tyshky, where Russian forces held and tortured detainees. Photo by Oleksandr Khomenko / Hromadske.

139 "From the beatings two ribs cracked under my heart". Interview by Hromadske: <https://hromadske.ua/posts/vid-pobittiv-u-mene-pid-sercem-odrazu-trisnuli-dva-rebra>

140 See note 24.

141 "Because of electricity my skin burnt". Detainees of torture chambers in Izium and Kozacha Lopan. Interview by BIHUS Info: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQ4voTduSJl>

142 "Bitch, you won't survive till the morning." Memories of occupation: torture by electricity, knocked out teeth, and broken ribs. Interview by Hromadske: <https://hromadske.ua/posts/suo-ti-do-ranku-ne-dozhivesh-spogadi-pro-okupaciyu-katuvannya-strumom-vibiti-zubi-ta-zlamani-rebra>

143 Ibid.

## Kherson region

### Basement of Kherson Regional Police Department

According to the Kherson police, after the liberation of the region, torture chambers were found in the basement of the Kherson Regional Police Department:

– In inhumane conditions, the aggressors kept those retired from law enforcement agencies, patriots and ordinary Kherson residents who refused to cooperate with the enemy. During the inspection of the torture chambers, law enforcement officers found and seized objects and other evidence indicating that the occupiers used torture against Kherson residents.<sup>144</sup>



Rope found in a torture chamber. Photo by the Kherson police.

### Basement of the Court of Appeal of Kherson region

Oleksiy, 14 years old, was detained in the basement of the Court of Appeal for 10 days for a suspicion of cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Oleksiy described how he was tortured to extract a confession:

– My eyes were blindfolded, the bag was put on me, my hands were tied. They brought us to some kind of basement. There were as many as 13 of us there... They played the 'Russian roulette' there, they electrocuted [detainees], hung [them] on bars. When a person had a heart attack and was leaning on bars, they simply took him off and threw back into the cell. ... I was taken to the hallway and beaten there.<sup>145</sup>

### Basement of the business center in Kherson

Serhiy Mak, a resident of Kherson, spoke about torture during his detention in the basement of the Kherson business center:

– They had their own investigators, and they had their own executioner – he was also called 'a specialist'... They called him and he came when he had to... We were taken to the basement, put on a chair, chained to the battery with shackles.

They started to torture, beat me, asking whom I knew among the guys from the territorial defence<sup>146</sup>, if I had a weapon and where it was, if I knew guys from the police, from the prosecutor's office, judges, hunters who have weapons. Of course, I replied that I didn't know...

144 Press release by Kherson Region Police. Posted on 3 Jan 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/khersonpolice.official/posts/537678335061185>

145 A 14-year old told about a torture chamber of the occupants in Kherson region – he spent 10 days there. Interview by Radio Svoboda: <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20221220-tokom-byut-vishayut-na-graty-14-richnyj-pidlitok-rozpoviv-pro-zahy-kativni-rf-na-hersonshhyni/>

146 Self-organized units of civilian residents who volunteered to protect their communities, notably in the beginning of the Russia's invasion in Ukraine.

They tortured me for five days – they beat me with a cable, beat me with a wire from a charger, put on a gas mask, strangled. On the sixth day they said: "You will 'sing' [speak out] better tomorrow." The next day they brought a device for electrocuting. It lasted for an hour... They [also] put a gun to my temple and pulled the trigger.<sup>147</sup>

### Skadovsk

We interviewed a former monitor of the National Preventive Mechanism, Valeriy, who was tortured by Russian soldiers for his refusal to cooperate with the occupation authorities.

On 12 August 2022, he was taken from his home to the local recreation center for children:

– They were very well informed about my activities before the war. They wanted to make me collaborate with them. When I refused, I was told that I could freely leave and go home. When I was going out, in the door hole, they squeezed me by the door. ...

Then there were a few electric shocks. It was very 'unpleasant' to say the least. Then I probably fell. When I regained consciousness, I realized that I was not only electrocuted but also beaten – my face was heavily injured.<sup>148</sup>

After the torture, Valeriy still has health problems – his right hand does not function as before.

According to Valeriy, many people went through this recreation center. Many were released, but some disappeared.

### The village of Khreschenivka

Viktor Kopytok, the village mayor, was taken to the basement of his warehouse:

– They closed me in the basement of the warehouse. On the warehouse [door] they hung a grenade. ... Probably sadists were among them, I don't know how to call this.

He warmed up a fire poker and asked me: "Do you know where the skin is the thinnest and closest to the bone?" What could I say? Then he said: "Well, we'll show you" and started to burn my heels.<sup>149</sup>

Russian servicemen took Andriy, another resident of Khreschenivka, to a torture chamber in a neighbouring village where he was placed together with 8 other persons for 3 months. He was threatened with execution because of a suspicion of collaboration with the Ukrainian authorities. Andriy did not want to go into more details about what happened to him in the torture chamber.<sup>150</sup>

### The village of Velyka Oleksandrivka

Serhiy Balan, a local policeman, recalls that residents were detained in the basement of a garage. He also was detained there:

– A Russian soldier came to me and asked: "Why are you staring at me?" He was holding a metal pipe. And he started to beat me on my legs. ...

[When they learnt that I was a policeman] he took a gun, [first] pointed it at my left ear, and then fired above my head. ... Then they started to point the gun to my genitalia and pulled the trigger. ...

5 men came to us, they started to shoot in the garage. They punched me and kicked me. ... There was a shelf with plates. They started to break them on my head. Then I fainted. They recovered me by pouring water. ... I had to endure. I was reminding myself that my wife was pregnant ... They told me that my wife would give birth as a dog – in the bushes.<sup>151</sup>

Later Serhiy was also tortured by electricity. After a few days, he started to have hallucinations.

147 *Electricity, anti-gas mask, 'expert torturer'. Testimonies on Russian torture chambers by Kherson citizens.* Interview by Radio Svoboda: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/skhemy-deokupovanyy-kherson/32165900.html>

148 Interview with survivor DE.

149 *The occupants abused us as Nazi. Occupation of Khreschenivka, story by the locals.* Interview by ICTV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URthPfJb830>

150 Ibid.

151 *Liberated Kherson region: giving birth in a basement and torture. Testimonies.* Interview by BIHUS Info: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN7ui-VBEX8&t=250s>

### **Container on the territory of the Beryslav machine-building plant**

A local resident, a teacher of history, was kept in a container on the territory of a local plant. The container was an iron box, two meters long and six to seven meters wide. He was taken from his home, blindfolded, and brought to the container. There were already 16 other detainees:

– On the first day, I was interrogated by two. They blindfolded me and brought me into some room. I was seated on a board nailed to the wall. First, they beat me with hands, then with a shocker, then put me down to the floor and beat me on the heels.

They finished the interrogation with electricity. They tied my hands behind, connected the wires to the little fingers and turned on the current. I started screaming.

On the second day, one soldier interrogated me. He did not beat with his hands, only with electric shocks and [beat] on the heels. At the end, he reconnected the wires to my fingers...

On the third day, the wires were immediately connected, the current was turned on, so I fell immediately. When I was lying, a current passed through me. I said that I had a heart disease, I asked for a pill. I was taken back to the container.<sup>152</sup>

## 7. DETENTION CONDITIONS

### I) OFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION

Official places of detention are dependent on stable supplies of food, medication, and other necessities. These supplies were interrupted shortly after the occupation of territories where places of detention were located. The Russian armed forces did not have plans to ensure continuity of the supplies by substituting the Ukrainian supplies with their own, which violates the requirements as stated in international humanitarian law.<sup>153</sup> This situation caused a disruption of normal functioning of places of detention, leading to shortages of food and water, and to the spread of diseases among detainees. The simultaneous disruption of energy and water supplies resulted in further deteriorating conditions of detention during both the cold and hot seasons (spring - autumn 2022).

In the beginning of the occupation, places of detention relied on their own stocks of food and other necessities. However, they started to run out of reserves fast, in a matter of weeks or sometimes months. To prevent starvation of detainees, staff of prisons, psychiatric hospitals and other places of detention had to rely on other local organisations and authorities, local volunteers, and even on their personal resources.

Since the Russian armed forces did not plan to administer places of detention in the NGCA in the longer run, they ultimately had to transfer most of the detainees to Russia. Such transfers often took place against their will, which may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>154</sup>

#### Prisons

##### **Snihurivska Colony no. 5, Mykolaiv region**

An interviewee who was imprisoned in this colony described how the conditions started to deteriorate after the hostilities began:

– In early April, we heard that Russian troops were already in Snihurivka. ... Until May, the Russian military did not enter the territory of the colony. But their influence was felt. They did not allow medical workers to work, they prevented the purchase of food products that had to be done by the administration of the colony in Mykolaiv, controlled by Ukraine. Most of the colony's employees were evacuated to the territory controlled by Ukraine. In the colony itself, somewhere up to 10-15% of the staff remained to work.

The nutrition of prisoners deteriorated significantly. We mostly ate grains. Sometimes there wasn't even [sunflower] oil. Of the medical workers, only two remained. There were 19 strikes in the colony and there was not a single undamaged window in the living units. In early May, an explosion injured one employee and one life prisoner. In fact, prisoners could have been evacuated. There was a period when this was [still] possible.<sup>155</sup>

Another interviewee who had contacts with detainees in this prison also told us that the prison suffered heavily from airstrikes leading to deterioration of detention conditions:

– In this colony, between the quarantine building and the living quarters, 4 missiles fell, all the glass fell out of windows in the 1st and 4th dormitories. The prisoners lived for 4 months without electricity, without communication, until they were transported to Holoprystanska Colony no. 7 [in Kherson region].<sup>156</sup>

##### **Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center**

We interviewed a prisoner who described the lack of food and medication during the occupation:

– In the beginning, we were allowed to receive parcels from relatives. Then it was banned ... we were all local, and we had such opportunities. The administration explained that they did not have time to deal with our parcels. Therefore, we could only eat what we were given in the colony. We fully depended on them.

153 For example, article 55 of the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949) requires that: 'To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate.'

154 Article 49, first paragraph, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides: 'Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.' Under Article 147 of the same convention, 'unlawful deportation or transfer ... of a protected person' constitutes a grave breach of the Convention, i.e. it constitutes a war crime. In addition, deportation of children from orphanages in the NGCA to Russia may constitute one of the forms of genocide (Article 2 (e), Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide).

155 Interview with survivor EF.

156 Interview with survivor C.



It was especially difficult with obtaining medical care. I started to get sick again. I was diagnosed with tuberculosis, HIV infection, hepatitis C. With 100% guarantee, without treatment and medication, I would simply die. In addition, everyone in the cell was infected with scabies. In my case, it went into the stage of Streptodermia. Of course, I started demanding medical care. But instead of medical assistance, I was brought to the head of [prison] security [Ukrainian: 'rezhym'] Ryzhuk.

Prior to that, the duty officer put me face against the wall with legs stretched and inflicted five blows with a truncheon on my buttocks and legs. Then they took me to the office of the head of security. I repeated my demands. I said that my whole body was covered in ulcers. I said that I didn't even have a chance to wash. But Ryzhuk said that he did not have the means to treat us. ...

Every time one of us requested medical assistance, he received nothing but threats and beatings. Every time I couldn't stand it and started demanding medical care, I was taken out of the cell and 'got' a baton. This was called to 'give glucose'. They hit me on the back, buttocks, and legs. I was beaten three times.<sup>157</sup>

The same interviewee recalls how he wanted to commit suicide because of the extremely poor prison conditions and treatment:

– Imagine: summer, heat, there are 12 of us in a 6-person cell, cramped, with scabies. There was no light. Water was supplied only in the evening and only for an hour. Besides, there were bedbugs in beds. There was no way to take a shower. The linen was not changed. During all the time [around 8 months] only once we were taken to the bathhouse. And even then, it was under escort, with screams, threats. So, I didn't even want to wash.

In the beginning, we were fed twice a day, and then once a day. They gave me either porridge or soup. Some bread – one loaf for 12 persons.

Until the very liberation [by the Ukrainian armed forces], until November, I was not given any help. I felt so bad that I wanted to cut my wrists and die. My whole body was covered in ulcers and wounds. Even now, when everything has healed, there are holes in my buttocks from ulcers where you can insert a finger.

The only ones from the colony who sympathized with us and tried to help us were the nurses ... But all they could do was to give us painkillers. ... They were not allowed into the cell. We just put our hand out through the feeder and they did an injection. Or sometimes they gave me a pill. In fact, there were medicines, there were necessary ointments. But the leadership of the colony simply did not allow medical workers to give them to us. After the liberation of the colony from the occupiers, we found out that the medicines were actually stored in a separate room.

If I was not released in November, 100% guarantee that I would have just died.<sup>158</sup>

Another interviewee who was also detained in the same prison recalls:

– Meals became two meals a day. They almost didn't take us to the bathhouse. There were problems with parcels. Many food items were banned, or they spoiled them. Communication with relatives was hidden.<sup>159</sup>

The problem of lack of showers was combined with the generally unsanitary detention conditions:

– The worst was that there was no way to wash. During the entire occupation, we were taken to the bath only twice. They took us to the shower under escort, like life prisoners, hurrying us with a stick. We weren't taken out for walks either. They said that there was no one to do this.

We were also disturbed by another problem. A sewer pipe in the toilet of our cell was damaged. And all the sewage poured out to us. Therefore, we closed the water in our cell and plugged this pipe so as not to live in this stench. We asked the administration for sewage repairs. But in vain. No one reacted to that.<sup>160</sup>

Another interviewee also reported that prisoners were tortured for asking for drinkable water.<sup>161</sup>

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157 Interview with survivor A.

158 Interview with survivor A.

159 Interview with survivor FG.

160 Interview with survivor GH.

161 Interview with survivor W.

### **Hola Prystan Colony no. 7, Kherson region**

A prisoner whom we interviewed was transferred to this prison during the occupation. He describes the events following the transfer:

– We were received by the employees of Colony no. 7 who took the side of the Russian Federation. Our prison duty officer handed over the card file to them. ... Then we were placed in ... a dorm. Colony no. 7 was also a prison for patients with tuberculosis. But they brought healthy people from Colony no. 90 and Colony no. 10. Everyone was mixed: healthy prisoners and those with tuberculosis.<sup>162</sup>

Another interviewee confirmed the extremely cramped conditions. He mentioned that the Russian servicemen transferred prisoners from three other prisons from Mykolaiv and Kherson region (no. 5, no. 10, and no. 90) into Hola Prystan Colony no. 7. Consequently, a living unit designed for 100 persons had to accommodate around 500 persons.<sup>163</sup>

## **Social and health care institutions**

### **Kharkiv region, the village of Strilecha**

Patients of the psychiatric hospital in the village of Strilecha were under occupation for 7 months. During the entire period, they lived in rooms with broken windows, including during sub-zero temperatures outside. Bedridden patients could not receive proper care due to the lack of the necessary number of staff for care.<sup>164</sup>

### **The village of Pisky-Radkivski, Kharkiv region**

The psychoneurological institution in Pisky-Radkivski was under occupation for five months, from April to September 2022. Upon the occupation, 167 patients remained in the institution. There was no electricity and gas, so the food was cooked on wooden stoves. According to an interview with the director of the school, Volodymyr Sherstyuk, during the occupation, Russian servicemen took him for mock executions four times. He was accused of helping Ukrainian soldiers.<sup>165</sup>

### **Kupiansk, Kharkiv region**

Olga Gunia, a doctor in Kupiansk Psychoneurological Institution, describes the conditions during the occupation by the Russian armed forces:

– In the beginning, we had a stock of food, medication, and diapers. This is what helped us. However, we did not have enough personnel. Only three nurses out of six remained. The others left. In April, the Russians cut the Ukrainian connection, water and electricity supply. ... We had gas cylinders, but they emptied soon, and we built a wood-burning stove outside ...

I had to search benzyl benzoate [ointment], because patients started to have scabies due to dirt and stress. They scratched the wounds and contaminated each other. We could not properly wash everyone. The disinfection rooms, where it would be possible to disinfect beddings and clothes, did not work.<sup>166</sup>

Olga describes how they started to run out of medication and food. Although the administration of the Center avoided any contacts with the Russian occupation administration, they had to start communicating when critical medication ended. Some medication was provided by the local hospital, but it was not enough. The situation with food was especially difficult:

– We started to have problems with food. Our stock started to clearly end. The Russians provided humanitarian aid to our patients, but in small portions. This was a drop in the sea. We needed other quantities, for 150 persons.

In the end of the summer, the food issue became critical. We had to reduce portions for the patients and feed them twice a day. But whenever they finished their portions, they would ask right away: "Are we going to eat more?"<sup>167</sup>

162 Interview with survivor N.

163 Interview with survivor C.

164 Interview with an employee of the hospital: Interview with survivor HI.

165 *How a psychoneurological internat in Pisky Radkivski survived the occupation.* Interview by Suspiine Kharkiv: <https://youtu.be/XEed4MYwo0o>

166 "We had a handful of food per day left". Kupiansk Psychoneurological Institution survived the occupation, shelling and evacuation. Interview by LB.UA: [https://lb.ua/society/2022/10/26/533723\\_u\\_zalishilosya\\_zhmentsi\\_izhi.html](https://lb.ua/society/2022/10/26/533723_u_zalishilosya_zhmentsi_izhi.html)

167 Ibid.

## II) UNOFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION

This section concerns detention conditions in unofficial places of detention, which are premises that are generally not recognized as places of detention and are by definition unsuitable for holding people. Such premises include for instance basements, garages, warehouses, agricultural compounds.. They lack any infrastructure to ensure even basic needs, such as heating, light, water supply and a sewage system. Therefore, such places may have temperatures unsuitable for living, and often lack natural light and access to fresh air.

Considering that almost all unofficial places of detention would not meet basic standards of detention, below are provided only few of the many examples of such conditions. Additional examples of human rights violations relating to poor detention conditions can be found in the section on torture in unofficial places of detention of this report.<sup>168</sup>

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found that, in the majority of cases, detention took place under conditions so severe that the confinement amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. This implies a violation of the right to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person during deprivation of liberty, as well as a war crime. The Commission described some of the commonly found conditions:

– Russian armed forces detained individuals in makeshift facilities established in buildings they had occupied, such as the basement of a school, an industrial facility, an agricultural facility, a train station, an airport, and various dwellings. Victims were often not informed of the reasons behind their detention and these acts were not reviewed by a judicial authority. Their families were not informed of their whereabouts, and some are still reported missing...

Detention was frequently prolonged, and facilities were cramped and overcrowded, at times with dozens of people forced to share a small space and to sleep on the floor. Men, women and children were held together in the same space. There was a lack of light, ventilation, and heating during the freezing March temperatures. Some were confined in a metal cellar. Access to food, water and medical care was limited, and sanitary conditions were lacking ...<sup>169</sup>

In one case, the Russian armed forces confined 365 civilians, including 70 children, for 28 days in the basement of a local school in the village of Yahidne in Chernihiv region. The Commission found that the Russian soldiers degraded and violated the dignity of the detainees, there was very limited access to food and water, and close to no access to medical care. Ten older persons died during the confinement because of the inhumane conditions and treatment.<sup>170</sup>

The survivors also recount that they had to sleep standing and go to toilet in front of other detainees. Given that Russian soldiers made their base out of the school and dug trenches around it, the survivors assume that they were used as a live shield<sup>171</sup>.



**The basement of the school in Yahidne (Chernihiv region) where 365 persons, including 70 children, were held. 10 of them died because of the lack of air and unsanitary conditions. Photo by Suspilne Chernihiv.**

168 See section 5a (ii).

169 *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/77/533, Paras. 76-77, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/637/72/PDF/N2263772.pdf?OpenElement>*

170 Ibid, para. 79.

171 *The entire village was kept in a basement. People were dying of suffocation.* Interview by Hromadske: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-E9zTQysMs>

There have been many other reports about individual cases of detention in inhuman conditions in unofficial places of detention on the NGCA. Below we highlight a few of them.

### **Balakliia, Kharkiv region**

The event took place in June 2022. A resident of Balakliia, Viktoria Shcherbak, and her family were deprived of their liberty.<sup>172</sup>

According to Viktoria, her husband and 16-year-old daughter were illegally deprived of liberty, kept in inhuman conditions, and tortured. First, the family was taken from their home by five Russian soldiers with automatic weapons and was placed in a basement in Balakliya. They kept them in a cage where they could not lie down.

Then they were moved to the local police station. There were five of them in the cell. The cell was unsanitary, there was no fresh air. They were fed once a day. They were given 2 litres of water per cell, for 5 people, per day. They were interrogated. The Russians threatened to beat and rape Viktoria's daughter in front of her, after which Viktoria fainted. She and her daughter were detained for a week. The husband was in detention for over 2 weeks.<sup>173</sup>

### **The village of Dymer, Kyiv region**

The event took place in March 2022 in a foundry of a local plant. People were brought in with hats down over their faces wrapped with tape, hands tied. In a room of 20 m<sup>2</sup> there were 48 persons. There was no natural light, and the detained civilians could understand the time of the day only by light coming from a crack in a window.<sup>174</sup>



The room where civilians were held in a factory in Dymer. Photo by Media Initiative for Human Rights.

### **The village of Nova Basan, Chernihiv region**

The village mayor, Mykola Diachenko (63), was detained in five different unofficial places of detention for 26 days. One of the unofficial places of detention was a basement measuring less than 9m<sup>2</sup>. Up to 20 persons were detained in the basement for two days without food and with only 2 litres of water for everyone. At some point they started to suffocate:

– We started to knock to the door, begging that anyone opens the door and lets us breath. In the end, [Russian] soldiers slightly opened the door to let some air in.<sup>175</sup>

### **Kherson region**

According to Ukraine's Ombudsman, Dmytro Lubinets, in addition to the critical detention conditions and torture episodes, men were detained together with women. They could spend weeks in such conditions and even to go to toilet in front of each other.<sup>176</sup>

172 Balakliia. "When the Russians said that they would rape my daughter, I lost consciousness". Interview by Radio NV: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z\\_TaFLP4iIg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_TaFLP4iIg)

173 Ibid.

174 Torture chamber in Dymer: a report from a Russian torture chamber. Interview by TSN: [https://youtu.be/oVEykhNf\\_4M](https://youtu.be/oVEykhNf_4M)

175 Ukraine: Executions and torture in the territories occupied by Russia. Interview by Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/uk/news/2022/05/18/ukraine-executions-torture-during-russian-occupation>

176 Video by Dmytro Lubinets published on his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=687193252980284>

## 8. KILLINGS

For the purposes of this report, we only recorded the cases of killings that took place in detention or were preceded by it. The actual killing did not necessarily take place inside such places. The killings were mostly identified upon liberation of the NGCA by the Ukrainian armed forces.

According to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, unlawful confinement was often the precursor to execution, sexual violence, torture, and ill-treatment.<sup>177</sup> For example, OHCHR documented 30 cases of executions of civilians in detention. Civilians were detained in houses, basements, garages, a post office, agricultural compounds, or other premises occupied by Russian troops. Bodies were found in makeshift detention facilities, and in most cases, with cuffed or duct-taped hands and injuries such as gunshot wounds in extremities or groin area, stab wounds, and mutilated limbs, suggesting the victims were tortured before being killed. In at least one documented case, the body of the victim bore injuries that suggested sexual violence.<sup>178</sup>

### I) OFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION

Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center

Information about a murder committed on 11 May 2022 by the Russian soldiers in Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Center appeared in the media, including the Russian news, soon after it took place. We have been able to verify this information by interviewing prisoners who were imprisoned during that period in Kherson SIZO, including cell mates of the deceased. 11 persons confirmed that the murder took place in cell no. 5 on 11 May 2022. The name of the deceased was Oleksandr. He was a resident of Kalanchak (Kherson region) before imprisonment.<sup>179</sup>

Below are selected testimonies from our interviews concerning the above killing.

– One day, I was sitting with a tablet on the bed and suddenly I heard explosions, shooting. Then I heard screams: "Muzzle [face] to the floor! All lie down on the floor! Who does not lie down, we will shoot them! Don't look out the window, we'll shoot!" I took off my headphones, I heard screams, swearing... My cellmates were lying on the floor.<sup>180</sup>

– That day, at lunchtime, Russian soldiers came to our pre-trial detention center. The acting head of the center invited them to suppress the non-existent riot of prisoners. The military threw grenades, fired machine guns. They ordered not to look out of the window. One prisoner was killed through a window from outside. His corpse remained in the cell one more day, and everyone who was in that cell was forced to stay there.<sup>181</sup>

Prisoners who were detained in the same cell as the deceased recall:

– When this happened, everyone was standing, some watched the TV, some were catching a connection with the phone, and Oleksandr was standing in the middle of the cell and looking out the window. He did not sit directly on the window, but [was watching] from the middle of the cell. We had low windows, everything was visible. He stood there putting on his shoes. We were all wearing slippers [because we thought that] maybe they would take us somewhere, no one knew what would happen. ... Then they shot ... He fell ...<sup>182</sup>

– Shots were fired, the ammo was then visible in my cell [stuck] in the wall. There were two shots, two rounds were fired. Well, the skull [of the victim] shattered. He fell to the floor and his head was lying on the nightstand. The skull flew off.

Two pieces of skull were on the floor. Everything around was covered in blood and brain. Everyone got on the floor, we laid there until about six o'clock in the evening, lying on the floor, all in blood.<sup>183</sup>

177 *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/77/533, Para. 77, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/637/72/PDF/N2263772.pdf?OpenElement>*

178 OHCHR Report *Killings of Civilians: Summary Executions and Attacks on Individual Civilians in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions in the context of the Russian Federation's Armed Attack against Ukraine*, December 2022. Para 32 : <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-07-OHCHR-Thematic-Report-Killings-EN.pdf>

179 Interview with survivor IJ.

180 Interview with survivor JK.

181 Interview with survivor V.

182 Interview with survivor KL.

183 Interview with survivor KL.

– I cleaned the brains and a piece of the back side of the skull from the floor with my own hands, I showed it to the administration.<sup>184</sup>

An eyewitness who was detained in this pre-trial detention center recalls another murder of a prisoner in this institution:

– Once they killed Dmytro Gus from Izmail in front of my eyes, and I was together with 12 other prisoners who also witnessed it. He was beaten only for wearing a beard and speaking Ukrainian. He was just beaten to death. And these were the employees of the Kherson Pre-trial Detention Center who did it.<sup>185</sup>

### **Hola Prystan Colony no. 7, Kherson region**

An interviewee informed us that he heard about killing of a prisoner in Holoprystanska Colony no. 7. He recalls:

– Four days after the transfer [to this prison], people in masks came to us and beat all prisoners. They had our dialect, the local one. This was an intimidation action, they took away our tablets, which were allowed by Ukrainian laws. One prisoner was killed (we were told so by prison employees). ... After this horror, some medical employees resigned.<sup>186</sup>

### **Pivnichna Colony no. 90, Kherson region**

An interviewee informed us that he witnessed events that may be indicative of a killing in this prison:

– I also heard from Colony no. 90 that, in the middle of the night, the Russians kidnapped three prisoners who were former Ukrainian soldiers. I don't know their names. I also know about one convict who was killed...

Two guys decided to escape from the prison, but they didn't succeed. That day I saw from the window the DPNK [the main duty officer] Yuryevich running. Then a few more employees followed him.

After a while, I saw a stretcher being carried. A man laid on it without signs of life. It was obvious that he was dead. The next day we learned from other inmates what had happened. The two disappeared without a trace. They [the administration] took our DNA samples.<sup>187</sup>

### **Mariupol Pre-Trial Detention Center, Donetsk region**

According to open sources information, when Russian soldiers ('Kadyrovtsy'<sup>188</sup>) entered the Pre-Trial Detention Center in Mariupol, they threw smoke grenades to prison corridors. They also started to shoot to the ceiling with automatic weapons. Prisoners were forced to stay in their cells. One prisoner with the nickname 'Stas Abhaz' wanted to speak to the soldiers but was reportedly shot dead.<sup>189</sup>

## **II) UNOFFICIAL PLACES OF DETENTION**

### **The village of Andriivka, Kyiv region**

The event took place on 18 March 2022. Russian soldiers imprisoned two 47 years old civilians, Volodymyr and Ihor, in a barn for one day and then executed them. A neighbour of the deceased assumed that the motive for the detention and execution was to take revenge for the successful counteroffensive of the Ukrainian armed forces against the Russians. The bodies were found by Makariv local self-defence militia in the neighbour's barn after the liberation of the village.<sup>190</sup>

184 Interview with survivor Y.

185 Interview with survivor K.

186 Interview with survivor EF.

187 Interview with survivor P.

188 See note 72.

189 Russian soldiers took over SIZO in Mariupol. Social media report that they shot dead the informal prison leader. <https://detective-info.com.ua/rosijski-vijskovi-zaxopili-sizo-v-mariupoli-u-soczmerzhezax-povidomyayut-shho-voni-zastrelili-smotryashhego-za-ustanovoyu.html>

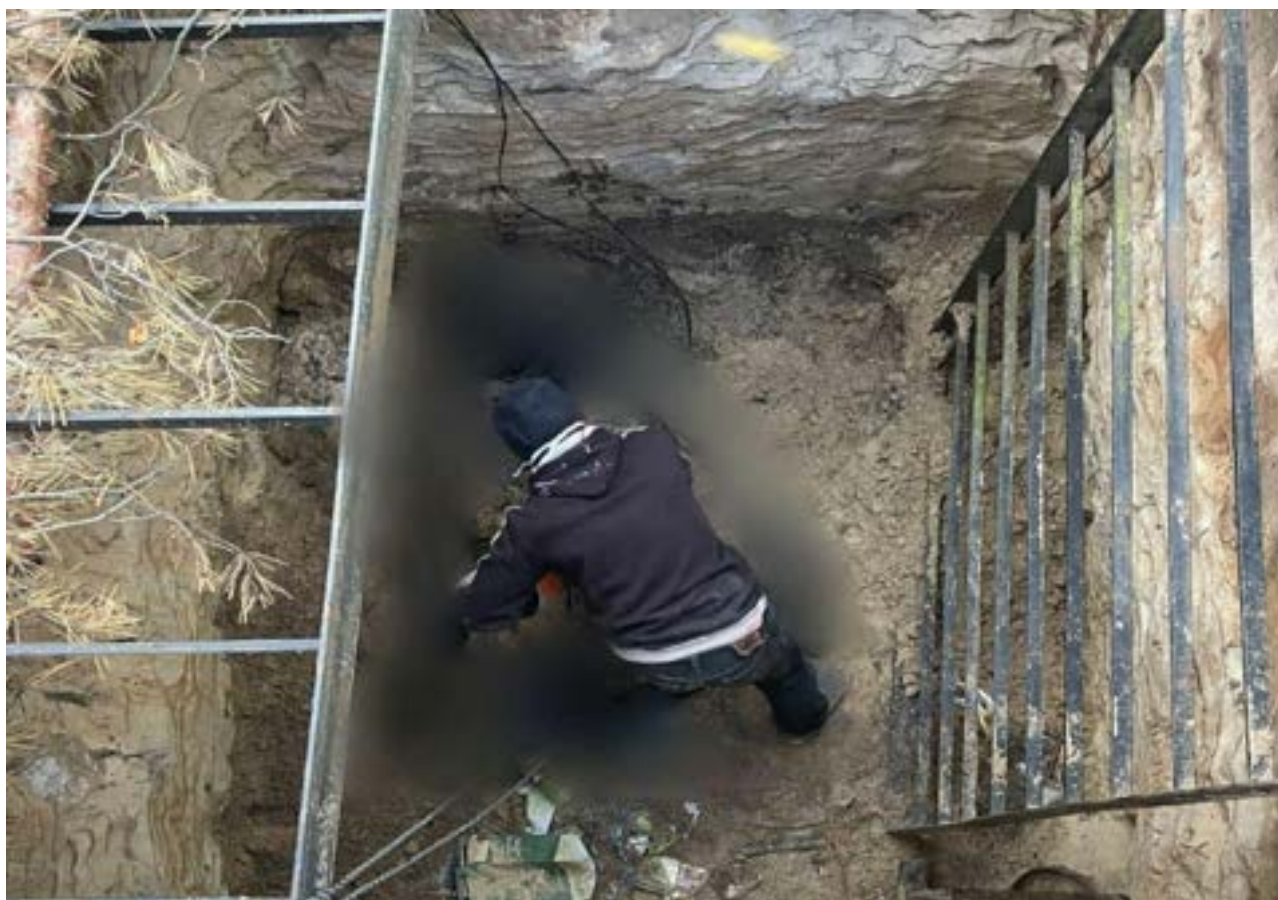
190 A village of spies. How Andriivka survived the occupation. Interview by Ukrainian Pravda: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooj4hUyxXR4&t=21s>



A witness who discovered the dead bodies showing the place where they were found. Photo by Ukrainska Pravda.

### The village of Borov Kharkiv region

Local citizens pointed out to a place where people could have been detained and tortured by Russian servicemen. The police found two dead bodies with signs of violent death in a deep pit. The exact cause of death was going to be established by a forensic expert. The bodies were attached to each other by handcuffs. The deceased could not leave the pit because it was too deep. One of the deceased scratched out his name on the wall.<sup>191</sup>



The pit where dead bodies were found. Photo by the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office.

191 "They died in a hole." The police told about the shackles fastened, which were found after the de-occupation of the Borivska community. Interview by Suspilne: <https://suspilne.media/290930-pomerli-v-ami-u-policii-rozkazali-pro-skripleni-kajdanami-akih-znajsl-pisla-deokupacii-borivskoi-gromadi/>

### **The village of Pisky-Radkivsky, Kharkiv region**

In the basement of a private house, Russian soldiers established a torture chamber. Local residents allege that the Russians tortured a prisoner of war to death and buried his body near the torture chamber. The residents re-buried the body.

Here is what a resident, Valery, recalled:

– They slightly covered him [the body of the deceased] with soil and that's it, about half a meter. They buried him and wrote "Soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine". We re-buried him then normally.<sup>192</sup>

### **The village of Borova, Kharkiv region**

In Borova, the Russian forces were located at a recreation resort. The Russians kept former Ukrainian soldiers with their hands and feet tied, without water and food. They tortured them to obtain information. After the liberation of Borova, three bodies with traces of torture were found in a pit.<sup>193</sup>

Here is what the mother of the tortured and murdered Sergei Avdeev, a former Ukrainian soldier, whose body was found in the pit recalled:

– The 'LNR'<sup>194</sup> came and took him away. And that's it... he has never returned... He was cut, with holes from knife penetrations. ... His fingers were all broken. We didn't even know it. This we learnt from the forensic expert who told us that he had all his fingers broken.<sup>195</sup>

Ukrainian law enforcement officers identified and arrested four Russian servicemen who tortured the detainees in Borova. The court found them guilty of violating the rules of war and imposed a sentence of 11 years of deprivation of liberty.<sup>196</sup>

192 "We heard people screaming": in a private house in Kharkiv region occupiers established a torture chamber for Ukrainian soldiers. Interview by Slidstvo Info: <https://www.slidstvo.info/warnews/chuly-yak-lyudy-krychaly-na-harkivshhyni-okupanty-u-pryvatomu-budynku-vlashtuvaly-kativnyu-dlya-ukrayinskyh-vijskovykh/>

193 Occupiers established a torture chamber in a recreation base in Borova: horrifying pictures from the site. Interview by 24 Kanal: [https://24tv.ua/boroviy-harkivshhyni-znayshli-shhe-odnu-kativnyu-rosiyan-video\\_n2174221](https://24tv.ua/boroviy-harkivshhyni-znayshli-shhe-odnu-kativnyu-rosiyan-video_n2174221)

194 The 'Luhansk People's Republic' ('LNR') is an unrecognised republic in the occupied parts of eastern Ukraine's Luhansk Oblast. The 'LNR' was created by armed Russian-backed separatists in 2014, and it initially operated as a breakaway state until it was illegally annexed by Russia in 2022.

195 "All his fingers were broken": the Russians tortured to death a former soldier in Kharkiv region. Interview by Slidstvo Info: <https://www.slidstvo.info/warnews/u-nogo-ysi-do-odnogo-palczi-buly-zlamani-rosiyan-zakatuvaly-eksvijskovogo-na-harkivshhyni/>

196 The Russians who abducted and tortured people in Borova are sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment: <https://www.slk.kh.ua/oblast-online/borova/rosian-aki-vikradali-ta-katuvali-ludej-u-borovij-zasudzeno-na-11-rokiv.html>



## 9. DESTRUCTION OF DETENTION FACILITIES BY MILITARY STRIKES

During the reporting period, many cases of shelling and damage to the premises of places of detention were recorded. In this section, we cover incidents not only in the NGCA, but also in the GCA as this allows demonstrating how the context of war directly impacted places of detention in Ukraine. Such incidents consisted mostly of artillery shelling of penal colonies, pre-trial detention facilities and social institutions. The shelling resulted in the destruction of places of detention, damage to the infrastructure, injuries and sometimes death of prison staff, prisoners, staff of social institutions and their residents.

Upon our official request to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the Department for the Execution of Sentences provided us with a list of 23 prisons in the GCA that were damaged as of 6 July 2022:

- 1 Mykolaiv Pre-Trial Detention Center
- 2 Snihurivska Colony no. 5
- 3 Kherson Pre-Trial Detention Detention Center
- 4 Pokrovska Colony no. 17
- 5 Kholodnohirska Colony no. 18
- 6 Kharkivska Colony no. 43
- 7 Kharkiv Pre-Trial Detention Center
- 8 Khroliv Correctional Center no. 140
- 9 Oleksiyivska Colony no. 25
- 10 Dykanivska Colony no. 12
- 11 Mariupol Pre-Trial Detention Center
- 12 Pryazovska Colony no. 107
- 13 Orikhivska Colony no. 88
- 14 Toretska Colony no. 2
- 15 Selidivska Colony no. 82
- 16 Mariupol Correctional Center no. 138
- 17 Bakhmut Penitentiary Institution no. 6
- 18 Kyiv Pre-Trial Detention Center
- 19 Chernihiv Pre-Trial Detention Center
- 20 Novgorod Severska Penitentiary Institution no. 31
- 21 Buchanska Colony no. 85
- 22 Chernihiv Colony no. 44
- 23 Cherkasy Colony no. 62

Due to such strikes, 5 employees of the prison system were killed, another 5 employees were injured, and one detainee was killed.<sup>197</sup> However, these numbers seem to reflect only casualties in prisons in the GCA. There were other casualties not included in the response we received from the Ministry of Justice. For example, reportedly at least 53 prisoners were killed by an explosion in the Olenivka prison, located in the NGCA of Donetsk region.

Below are a few examples of the many available incidents of shelling of places of detention.

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197 Response of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine of 13 February 2023.

**Bakhmut Penitentiary Institution no. 6, Donetsk region**

The shelling that took place on 1 November 2022 hit the territory of the institution, namely the theatre ('club') and the administrative building of the institution. As a result, the roof of the club, eleven double-glazed windows in the gym and eight double-glazed windows on the inside of the administrative building were damaged. However, there were no injuries among the staff.<sup>198</sup>

This institution was also shelled many other times as it was located close to the area of active hostilities.

**Olenivka Colony, Donetsk region**

On 29 July 2022, more than 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war were killed and at least 75 were wounded in an attack at a prison in Olenivka. The prison was located in the part of Donetsk region controlled by Russia.

Russia and Ukraine have accused each other of launching the attack. The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces said that the Russians blew up the barracks to cover up the torture and murder of Ukrainian POWs that had been taking place there<sup>199</sup>, while Russians claimed that a HIMARS rocket was shot from the Ukrainian territory.<sup>200</sup> According to a CNN investigation based on the work of forensic and weapons experts, the Russian version of events is very likely a fabrication, as there is virtually no chance that the damage was caused by a HIMARS rocket.<sup>201</sup>

On 3 August 2022, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced his decision to establish a fact-finding mission, as requested by both Russia and Ukraine. However, Russia refused to cooperate with the UN and International Red Cross, and the fact-finding mission was disbanded.<sup>202</sup>

**Orikhivska Colony no. 88, Zaporizhzhya region**

The artillery shelling lasted from 17:30 on 28 September 2022 to 06:00 on 29 September 2022. Seven shells hit the colony. According to the Ukrainian authorities, the damages were caused to the territory of the central alley of the residential area, to the prison workshops, and the boiler house.

Another incident of shelling of this institution lasted from 22:00 on 31 October 2022 to 03:00 on 01 November 2022. The first shell hit the administrative building and damaged the bathroom for the staff of the institution. The second shell hit the building of the warehouse.



Premises of Orikhivska Colony no. 88. Photo by the National Police of Ukraine.

198 Interview with survivor LM.

199 Russians struck Olenivka to cover up the torture and execution of prisoners General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/07/29/7360850/>

200 Russia says Ukraine struck prison in Donetsk region, killing 40: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-40-ukrainian-pows-killed-by-ukrainian-missile-strike-donetsk-prison-2022-07-29/>

201 Russia claims Ukraine used US arms to kill jailed POWs. Evidence tells a different story: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2022/08/europe/olenivka-donetsk-prison-attack/>

202 Olenivka Prison Massacre : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olenivka\\_prison\\_massacre#cite\\_note-prison-attack-2022-08-03-7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olenivka_prison_massacre#cite_note-prison-attack-2022-08-03-7)

### **Pokrovsk Colony no. 19, Kharkiv region.**

We interviewed a prisoner who was injured during a shelling of this prison. On 19 March 2022, because of an explosion, he was thrown back by a blast wave and suffered injuries. Consequently, he cannot walk anymore and uses a wheelchair. His family does not have the funds for the necessary surgery that will allow him to walk again.<sup>203</sup>

### **Oskil Psychoneurological Institution, Kharkiv region**

The Oskil psychoneurological institution for 400 people with mental disorders was shelled in March 2022. This caused destruction of the 2nd and 3rd floor of the five-story building. A fire broke out in some rooms. 73 residents had previously been transferred to another institution. However, 330 people with disabilities, bedridden patients who could not move independently, and 30 staff members remained in the institution.

Thanks to the timely sheltering in the basement, the shelling did not kill anyone. Due to the resulting interruption of power supply, food was cooked on fire. In addition, the patients lacked basic necessities, such as food, drinking water and medicine.<sup>204</sup>

In September 2022, the village of Oskil, was liberated:

– Each part of Oskil psychoneurological municipal institution has traces of the 'Russian world'. Instead of a modern institution for people with disabilities to feel comfortable, there are empty buildings with the consequences of the Russian horde now. Damaged buildings, huge piles of garbage, five-meter craters from bombs... The institution still remains without electricity, water, gas, heating...<sup>205</sup>



Staff in front of the buildings of the Oskil Psychoneurological Institution, Kharkiv region. Photo by Oskil PNI.

203 *The Russian military aggression brings sorrow also to prisoners.* Interview by NGO 'Protection of Prisoners of Ukraine': <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=435835958483236>

204 Interview with survivor MN.

205 Press release by Oskil Internat, published on 31 October 2022: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1278703346257036&id=100023521490943](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1278703346257036&id=100023521490943)

### **Psychoneurological Institution, the village of Strilecha, Kharkiv district**

On 17 September 2022, while trying to evacuate patients of the institution, four doctors were killed, and two patients were injured. According to the statement of the Head of Kharkiv Regional Administration, Oleg Synyegubov:

- In the village of Strilecha, Kharkiv district, doctors tried to evacuate patients of a psychiatric hospital. Medical workers, risking their lives, tried to save the patients even under fire. It had been possible to evacuate 30 patients. In total, more than 600 patients were [accommodated] in the institution.<sup>206</sup>



The car in which the doctors were killed. Photo by the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office.

### **Geriatric hospital in Kreminna (Luhansk region)**

According to the Head of Luhansk Regional Administration, Serhiy Gaidai, 56 persons were killed by a tank shooting at the Geriatric hospital in Kreminna:

- On 11 March, Russian occupiers fired on the geriatric institution in Kreminna from a tank. It was cynical and intentional. They just fitted the tank, put it in front of the building and started shooting. 56 people died on the spot. The 15 persons who survived were kidnapped and taken to the occupied territory in Svatove [a district center in the north of Luhansk region], to [another] regional geriatric institution.<sup>207</sup>

### **Other social institutions, Sumy region**

There have been reports that 4 other social institutions were damaged in Sumy region: Ohtyrskiy Orphanage, Atynskiy Psychoneurological Institution, Sumy Geriatric Institution, and Bilopilsky Orphanage.<sup>208</sup>

206 Telegram Channel: <https://t.me/synyegubov/4267>

207 In a geriatric house in Kreminna, 56 persons died. <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kreminna-rozstril-budynku-dlya-litnih-lyudej-gajdaj/31761905.html>

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DIGNITY Publication Series on Torture and Organised Violence No. 42

**DIGNITY's STATE DIALOGUE PROGRAMME TO PREVENT TORTURE:**

**"Nine circles of hell":**

**Places of Detention in Ukraine under the Russian Occupation, March 2022 – December 2022**

By Vadym Chovgan\*), Mykhailo Romanov #), Vasyl Melnychuk +)

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Ukraine without Torture (UwT) ^)

Photos: Dumka.media (page), Taras Ibragimov/Suspilne(), Sergey Bolvinov/Suspilne (), Oleksandr Khomenko / Hromadske (), Kherson Police Department (), Suspilne Chernihiv (), Media Initiative for Human Rights, Ukrainska Pravda (), Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office (), National Police of Ukraine (), Oskil PNI ()

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Ronsbo, H. (Ed.)

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ISBN: 978-87-93675-70-4 (digital)

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