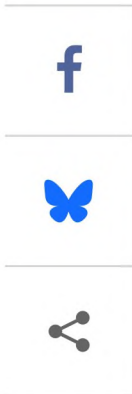




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Ukraine: Apparent War Crimes in Russia- Controlled Areas

Summary Executions, Other Grave Abuses by Russian Forces



Destroyed Russian armored vehicles in the city of Bucha, northwest of Kyiv, Ukraine, on March 4, 2022. © 2022 ARIS MESSINIS/AFP via Getty Images

(Warsaw) – Human Rights Watch has documented several cases of [Russian](#) military forces committing laws-of-war violations against civilians in occupied areas of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions of [Ukraine](#). These include a case of repeated rape; two cases of summary execution, one of six men, the other of one man; and other cases of unlawful violence and threats against civilians between February 27 and March

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14, 2022. Soldiers were also implicated in looting civilian property, including food, clothing, and firewood. Those who carried out these abuses are responsible for war crimes.

“The cases we documented amount to unspeakable, deliberate cruelty and violence against Ukrainian civilians,” said [Hugh Williamson](#), Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Rape, murder, and other violent acts against people in the Russian forces’ custody should be investigated as war crimes.”



Human Rights Watch interviewed 10 people, including witnesses, victims, and local residents of Russia-occupied territories, in person or by

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telephone. Some people asked to be identified only by their first names or by pseudonyms for their protection.

On March 4, Russian forces in Bucha, about 30 kilometers northwest of Kyiv, rounded up five men and summarily executed one of them. A witness told Human Rights Watch that soldiers forced the five men to kneel on the side of the road, pulled their T-shirts over their heads, and shot one of the men in the back of the head. “He fell [over],” the witness said, “and the women [present at the scene] screamed.”

Russian forces in the village of Saryi Bykiv, in Chernihiv region, rounded up at least six men on February 27, and later

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executed
them,
according to the mother of one
of the men, who was nearby
when her son and another man
were apprehended, and who saw
the dead bodies of all six.

A 60-year-old man told Human
Rights Watch that on March 4, a
Russian soldier threatened to
summarily execute him and his
son in Zabuchchya, a village
northwest of Kyiv, after
searching their home and
finding a hunting rifle and
gasoline in the backyard.
Another soldier intervened to
prevent the other soldier from
killing them, the man said. His
daughter corroborated his
account in a separate interview.

On March 6, Russian soldiers in
the village of Vorzel, about 50
kilometers northwest of Kyiv,
threw a smoke grenade into a
basement, then shot a woman
and a 14-year-old child as they
emerged from the basement,

where they had been sheltering. A man who was with her in the same basement when she died from her wounds two days later, and heard accounts of the incident from others, provided the information to Human Rights Watch. The child died immediately, he said.

A woman told Human Rights Watch

that a Russian soldier had repeatedly raped her in a school in the Kharkiv region where she and her family had been

sheltering on

March 13. She said that he beat her and cut her face, neck, and hair with a knife. The next day the woman fled to Kharkiv, where she was able to get medical treatment and other

People walk amid destruction as they evacuate a frontline area between the cities of Bucha and Irpin, near Kyiv, Ukraine, March 10, 2022.
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services. Human Rights Watch reviewed two photographs, which the woman shared with Human Rights Watch, showing her facial injuries.

Many of the Ukrainian civilians we interviewed described Russian forces taking food, firewood, clothing, and other items such as chainsaws, axes, and gasoline.

Russia-Ukraine War

On February 24, 2022, Russia commenced a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine.

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All parties to the armed conflict in Ukraine are obligated to abide by international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, and

customary international law. Belligerent armed forces that have effective control of an area are subject to the international law of occupation. International human rights law, which is applicable at all times, also applies.

The laws of war prohibit willful killing, rape and other sexual violence, torture, and inhumane treatment of captured combatants and civilians in custody. Pillage and looting are also prohibited. Anyone who orders or deliberately commits such acts, or aids and abets them, is responsible for war crimes. Commanders of forces who knew or had reason to know about such crimes but did not attempt to stop them or punish those responsible are criminally liable for war crimes as a matter of command responsibility.

“Russia has an international legal obligation to impartially

investigate alleged war crimes by its soldiers,” Williamson said. “Commanders should recognize that a failure to take action against murder and rape may make them personally responsible for war crimes as a matter of command responsibility.”

For detailed findings, please see below.

Kharkiv Rape

On March 13, a Russian soldier beat and repeatedly raped Olha [not her real name], a 31-year-old woman in Malaya Rohan, a village in the Kharkiv region that Russian forces controlled at the time.

Russian soldiers entered the village on February 25, Olha said. That day, about 40 villagers, mostly women and girls, were sheltering in the basement of a local school. She was there with her 5-year-old daughter, her mother, her 13-

year-old sister, and her 24-year-old brother.

At around midnight on March 13, a Russian soldier forcibly entered the school, Olha said: “He broke glass windows at the entrance to the school and banged on the door.” A guard opened the door.

The soldier, who carried an assault rifle and a pistol, went into the basement and ordered everyone there to line up. The woman stood in the line holding her daughter, who was asleep. He told her to give him the girl, but she refused. He told her brother to come forward and ordered the rest of the group to kneel, or, he said, he would shoot everyone in the basement.

The soldier ordered her brother to follow him to help find food. They left and came back an hour or two later. The soldier sat down on the floor.

“People started asking if they could go to the bathroom and he let them, in groups of two and three,” Olha said. After that, people started settling down for the night. The soldier approached her family and told her to follow him.

The soldier took her to a classroom on the second floor, where he pointed a gun at her and told her to undress. She said: “He told me to give him [oral sex]. The whole time he held the gun near my temple or put it into my face. Twice he shot at the ceiling and said it was to give me more ‘motivation.’” He raped her, then told her to sit on a chair.

She said she was getting very cold in the unheated school and asked if she could get dressed, but the soldier told her she should only put on her top, not her pants or underwear. “While I was putting on my clothes, the soldier told me that he was

Russian, that his name was [name withheld] and that he was 20. He said that I reminded him of a girl he went to school with.”

The soldier told her to go to the basement and get her things, so that she could stay in the classroom with him. She refused. “I knew my daughter would cry if she saw me,” she said. The soldier got a knife and told her to do so as he said if she wanted to see her child again. The soldier raped her again, put a knife to her throat and cut the skin on her neck. He also cut her cheek with the knife and cut off some of her hair. He hit her on the face with a book and repeatedly slapped her. Photographs that she shared with Human Rights Watch, dated March 19 and 20, show cut marks and bruising on her neck and face.

At about 7 a.m. on March 14, the soldier told her to find him a

pack of cigarettes. They went downstairs together. She asked the guard to give the soldier some cigarettes. After the soldier got the cigarettes, he left.

That day she and her family walked to Kharkiv, where volunteers provided her with basic medical assistance. They moved into a bomb shelter. “I am lucky to be alive,” she said. She said that the Malaya Rohan council authorities were in touch with her and her mother and that the authorities were preparing a criminal complaint, which they plan to file with Ukraine’s prosecutor’s office.

Human Rights Watch received three other allegations of sexual violence by Russian soldiers in other villages in the Chernihiv region and in Mariupol in the south but has not been able to independently verify them.

Summary Killings, Other Violence

On February 27, Russian forces rounded up six men in the village of Saryi Bykiv, in the Chernihiv region, and summarily executed them. Tetiana, from Novyi Bykiv, which faces Saryi Bykiv, just across the Supiy River, spoke with the relatives of four of the men who were killed. She told Human Rights Watch that on February 27, the bridge between Novyi Bykiv and Saryi Bykiv was blown up, and Russian forces shelled both villages. A column of Russian armored vehicles then entered Saryi Bykiv.

“Most people were hiding in their basements because of shelling, and soldiers went door to door,” Tetiana said the families from Saryi Bykiv told her. The soldiers took six men from their homes:

They took six men from three different families. One mother had both of

her sons taken [and shot]. Another young man was in his early 20s, his name was Bohdan, I know his mother well, she told me that the soldiers told her to wait near her house while they took her son ... to question him. They said the same thing to other families. Instead, they led these six men away, took them to the far end of the village, and shot them.

Viktoria, Bohdan's mother, interviewed separately, told Human Rights Watch that on February 27:

They took my son, Bohdan [age 29], and my brother-in-law, Sasha [full name Olexander, age 39]. We were in the basement [due to the shelling], so we didn't see. They went out to smoke. Then our neighbor ran up and said he saw them taking Bohdan and

Sasha away, and a few other guys.

Viktoria ran to the street to ask Russian soldiers at the checkpoint what had happened. “They told us not to worry, that [soldiers] would scare them a bit and then let them go,” she said. “We walked away about 50 meters ... and heard gunshots. It was about 6:20 p.m.”

Viktoria said that the next day she and her sister went to the meadow and saw the bodies lying by a building there:

Three were on one side of the building, but not my son and brother-in-law. We walked around to the other side and saw [Bohdan and Sasha, and one more]. They were laying there. There were gunshots to their heads. Their hands were tied behind their backs. I looked at my son’s body, his pockets were empty, he

didn't have his phone, or keys or [identity] documents.

Viktoria asked soldiers at the checkpoint for permission to collect the bodies, but they refused. Heavy shelling continued the following days.

On March 7, Viktoria said, they again asked the soldiers for permission to collect the bodies: "At the checkpoint they told us to go the cemetery, that they'd bring us the bodies.... Everyone [all the neighbors] came, like 75 people.... We buried all of them on the same day, in separate graves."

Viktoria said that the other four men buried that day were Volodymyr, 40, another Olexander, 40, and two brothers, Ihor, 31, and Oleh, 33.

Tetiana said the soldiers also took all of the villagers' wood, leaving them nothing for cooking or heating their homes.

On March 4, Russian forces summarily executed a man in Bucha, 30 kilometers northwest of Kyiv, and threatened to execute four others, said a teacher who witnessed the killing. She said she heard shooting at about 7 a.m. and saw three Russian armored vehicles and four Kamaz [Russian brand] trucks driving down her street. She was sheltering in the cellar with her two dogs when she heard glass breaking, and then her front door being broken down. Voices outside said [in Russian]: “Come outside right now or we will throw a grenade.”

She yelled that she was alone in the cellar and came out with her hands up.

“There were three men outside, two [Russian] soldiers and a commander,” she said. “They took my phone and checked it, then told me to get my [identification] documents and

come with them.” As she walked down the street with the soldiers, she saw that they were also rounding up her neighbors and ordering them to walk. She said:

They took us to where the office of AgroButpostach [a rental storage company] used to be. Right next to the building, there is a parking lot and a small square. They gathered people at that square, mostly women but there were also several men among us, over 50 [years old]. There were around 30 military there and the commander had [paratrooper] insignia [on his fatigues]. He spoke with an accent from western or central western Russia.... I was born in Russia myself, so I pick up on such things. The soldiers were all thin and looked the worse for wear.

She said that the soldiers brought about 40 people to the square, gathered everyone's phones, checked documents, and asked who was in territorial defense, or local self-defense units:

Two women asked to go to the bathroom. One of them was pregnant. I asked to go with them. A soldier showed us the way to the toilet, which was around the building, I think it was now their headquarters. The building **was long**. Along the wall on the other side, we saw a large pool of blood.

She said they waited in the square for hours in the very cold weather:

At one point they brought in one young man, then four more. The soldiers ordered them [to] take off their boots and jackets.

They made them kneel on the side of the road. Russian soldiers pulled their T-shirts, from behind and over their heads. They shot one in the back of the head. He fell. Women screamed. The other four men were just kneeling there. The commander said to the rest of the people at the square: “Don’t worry. You are all normal – and this is dirt. We are here to cleanse you from the dirt.”

She said that after several more hours the soldiers took the people back to their homes. The other four men remained kneeling when she left.

She said that when she was able to leave the town on March 9, the young man’s body was still lying where he had been shot.

Dmytro, 40, told Human Rights Watch that he and his family fled the heavily shelled city of

Bucha on March 7. He said that they did not know of any safe evacuation routes, so they walked – wrapped in white sheets and waving white sheets in the air – for about five kilometers to the village of Vorzel.

Once in Vorzel, they sheltered for two nights in the basement of a two-story building, with a group of local residents. Dmytro said that there was a woman with them in the basement who had chest and leg wounds. Other people in the basement told him that she had been shot the day before, when Russian soldiers stormed that same basement and threw a smoke grenade inside. Several people panicked and ran outside, where Russian soldiers fired at them. The woman was wounded, and the people in the basement told him that a 14-year-old child was shot in the head and killed. Dmytro said that the woman died the next day, on March 8.

He and several local residents buried her outside the bomb shelter.

On March 4, Russian forces threatened to execute a man and his son in Zabuchchya, a village outside the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv. A village resident said that on March 4, Russian forces entered the village, where he was sheltering with 10 other people, including a family from Irpin, in the basement of his home. In a separate interview, his daughter corroborated his account. He said that 13 soldiers entered his house to search it:

The soldiers asked about my son, 34, who is in the territorial defense. He came out to meet them. They asked who was in the house and then they searched the house and turned it upside down.... In the backyard, they found my hunting rifle and a bottle of gasoline,

and they went ballistic.

The commander who gave orders to others said: “Take them [me and my son] to the tree outside and shoot them.” They took us outside. One of the soldiers objected. They took us back inside and ordered my son to strip naked because they said they wanted to look for nationalist tattoos. Other soldiers also went to houses on our street, including the house of a judge – she had gone and locked the house – and the local council deputy.

They broke the window in the judge’s house to get in. We saw them taking bags and bags of stuff out of the judge’s house. After that, they left.... I took my family and everyone who was in the basement, and we fled in two cars. My wife and my son and mother, 80, are

now staying at my
daughter's house in
Khodosivka [southwest of
Kyiv].

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