*Geneva International Centre for Justice*

**63rd Session of the Human Rights Council**

# HRC63: WINTER IS COMING: CAN UKRAINE'S CIVILIANS WITHSTAND ANOTHER SEASON OF WAR?




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October 2026

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# I. Executive Summary

The Interactive Dialogue on 2 October 2026, opened with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Mr. Volker Türk, presenting an oral update on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine. The High Commissioner highlighted the intensification of hostilities, rising civilian casualties, attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure, and the continued need for accountability alongside efforts toward restoring peace.

Central to the discussion was OHCHR's thematic report on conflict-related sexual violence, which documented 1,004 cases, with 89 per cent attributed to Russian Federation authorities and 11 percent to Ukrainian authorities. The report identified patterns of sexual violence used as a method of torture against prisoners of war and civilians and called for stronger prevention, accountability, survivor-centred support, and access for independent monitors.

Throughout the Interactive Dialogue, delegations and organisations raised concerns regarding civilian casualties, attacks on civilian infrastructure, the treatment of prisoners of war and civilian detainees, the impact of the conflict on children, and barriers to monitoring violations in occupied territories. Accountability remained a central issue, with speakers calling for continued documentation, access to justice, reparations, and respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Ukraine affirmed the findings presented by the High Commissioner and called for increased international support to protect civilians and ensure accountability. The Russian Federation challenged the findings and methodology of the report, arguing that the information relied upon confidential sources and failed to adequately address alleged violations committed by Ukraine.

In his concluding remarks, the High Commissioner reiterated the need for independent investigations into conflict-related sexual violence, access to prisoners of war and civilian detainees, an end to attacks on civilian infrastructure, and the protection of human rights in any future peace agreement.

**Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)** expresses deep concern over the findings presented by the High Commissioner and stresses that lasting peace must be accompanied by accountability and respect for international law. GICJ calls for the protection of civilians from sexual violence,, survivor-centred justice, humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilian detainees, independent monitoring and documentation of violations, and continued international efforts toward a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.

## II. Background

Although conflict and Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory began in 2014, the human rights situation deteriorated significantly following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Russian forces launched attacks across Ukraine and occupied additional territory in the eastern and southern regions of the country. The ensuing hostilities have resulted in extensive civilian casualties, mass displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure and continuing concerns regarding the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war. The conflict has also created significant challenges for the protection and monitoring of human rights, particularly within territories occupied by the Russian Federation.

On 8 July 2025, the Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 59/22, titled "Cooperation and assistance to Ukraine in the field of human rights," under agenda item 10, which focuses on technical assistance and capacity building. The resolution requests UNHCHR to present continuous oral updates regarding the findings of international human rights violations and international humanitarian law breaches in Ukraine at each Council session leading up to the 65th session. Each update is mandated to be followed by an Interactive Dialogue.

Since the adoption of Resolution 59/22, the OHCHR has documented alarming violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, identifying surges in civilian harm, repeated attacks on energy and other civilian infrastructure, executions and torture of prisoners of war, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and coercive practices in occupied territories.

## III. Summary of the Report of the UNHCHR

The OHCHR published a thematic report examining the data, trends, and patterns of conflict-related sexual violence committed in the context of the Russian Federation's full-scale armed attack against Ukraine. The report covers the period from 24 February 2022 to 31 July 2026 and is based primarily on confidential interviews conducted by the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, supplemented by court documents, official records, and other relevant sources.[1] The OHCHR emphasises that its findings are not comprehensive because conflict-related sexual violence remains significantly underreported and access to Russian-occupied territory remains restricted.

During the reporting period, the OHCHR documented 1,004 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in detention and non-detention settings. Of the verified cases, 89 percent were attributed to Russian Federation authorities and 11 percent to Ukrainian authorities. The OHCHR found that sexual violence was used as a method of torture against prisoners of war and civilians.[2]

The OHCHR verified 892 cases attributable to Russian Federation authorities, affecting 725 men, 151 women, 14 girls, and two boys.[3] The report identifies widespread sexual violence against Ukrainian prisoners of war, retained medical personnel, and civilian detainees throughout various stages of captivity. Documented violations included rape and attempted rape, sexual assault, genital mutilation, electric shocks and beatings to the genitals, forced nudity, threats of sexual violence, and other forms of sexually degrading treatment. Outside detention, women and girls in Russian-occupied territories also face sexual violence.

The report also documented 112 cases attributable to Ukrainian authorities, involving 98 men and 14 women. These cases primarily concerned Russian and third-country prisoners of war and conflict-related detainees. The OHCHR noted that nearly half of these violations consisted exclusively of threats of sexual violence.[4] Ukraine has taken measures to prevent and address violations, including legal reforms, command-level directives, cooperation with monitoring

[1] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Sexual Violence in the Context of the Russian Federation Full-Scale Armed Attack Against Ukraine: 24 February 2022–31 July 2026*, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/63/CRP.2, ¶¶ 1, 9–13 (Sept. 21, 2026).
[2] *Id.* ¶¶ 2–4.
[3] *Id.* ¶ 16.
[4] *Id.* ¶¶ 60–61, 69–72.

mechanisms, and measures supporting survivors; however, OHCHR found that progress towards accountability for violations committed by Ukrainian personnel remains limited.

The report ultimately calls for stronger prevention for human rights violations, accountability for all perpetrators, access to justice and reparations for victims, survivor-centered support, greater access for independent monitors and continued international support from States for survivors and accountability efforts

## IV. Exhaustive Summary of the Interactive Dialogue

### 1. Opening Remarks by the UNHCHR




The UNHCHR, Mr. Volker Türk, began his oral report by demanding urgent action aligned with the UN Charter and international law to end the war in Ukraine. He emphasised the alarming findings rearding the use of sexual violence for acts of torture, intimidation and coercion of individuals and communities and acknowledged that though Ukrainains are responsible for acts of sexual violence, out of 1000 cases documented, 89 per cent were attributed to the Russian authorities. Furthermore, he highlighted that most of the victims of sexual violence were men, in places of detention, though women in occupied territory of Ukraine were also affected.

The UNHCHR stated “alongside peace, there must be accountability,” emphasising the documented hundreds and thousands of those injured and killed at the hands of Russia. While Russia faces no consequences, apartment buildings, schools, medical centers, railways, sea ports, gas stations, shops and logistics and telecommunication companies continue to face attacks, destroying lives, and hope for restoration for the Ukrainian people. He acknowledged Russia as the aggressor, due to their continuous infliction of immense suffering on Ukrainians, and challenged Russian leadership to consider how this war is affecting their own society; Are they putting death and destruction ahead of healthcare and education? He states “I’m shocked by the lack of empathy on display, continuous escalation is creating a vertex of vengeance and reprisals that will have terrible consequences for people and communities for decades to come.”

The UNHCHR then goes on to highlight statistics that paint the picture of the human rights crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. On the 12 and 13 of September, one civilian was killed and sixty-three injured in attacks involving missiles and drones in the Odessa region; on 19 to 20 of September, three people were killed and 41 injured in a missile and drone attack on Moscow region; in Kyiv, air raid alerts were active for 33 hours, during a 148 hour period during the week of the 28 September; though these facts are believed to be true, authorities have not granted access to verify these reports fully. Moreover, he also acknowledged the impact the war has on the environment, considering the unidentified effects of the toxins and chemicals on land, rivers and lakes, and states “it is clear that today’s reckless warmongers are oblivious to the harm they are causing future generations[…] the conduct of this war to date cannot be allowed to dictate its future. We need a decisive shift towards de-escalation and peace.”

Beyond the war statistics, the UNHCHR shed light on Russia's recent election as an attempt to incorporate Ukrainian territory it occupies, emphasising the elections as another human rights violation of international law. He mentioned third country fighters who were deceived into joining the Russian forces.

The UNHCHR concluded by urging the international community to rebuild momentum towards negotiations and offers measures to reduce the impact of hostilities on civilians such as: an agreement to end attacks on economic targets and energy infrastructure, local ceasefires on the front lines, enabling civilians to leave Oleski and a full exchange of prisoners of war respecting the principle of enforcement.

## 2. Statement by Ukraine as the Country Concerned




“Behind every figure is a human being.” The delegate for Ukraine made the previous quote after reading alarming statistics of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian Federation authorities. The speaker affirmed the findings addressed by the UNHCHR regarding sexual violence and its use for torture, intimidation and coercion and highlighted Russia’s arbitrary detentions with no accountability.

The speaker emphasised Ukraine’s openness to all UN monitoring mechanisms and willingness to provide access to relevant institutions, information and places of detention of prisoners of war. They also stated Ukraine is strengthening zero tolerance policies on sexual violence and harrasment across the security and defence sector to enhance training, awareness and advance legislative changes.

He stressed the need for accountability not just for sexual violence, but for all of the repeated attacks by Russia against Ukrainian civilians, in schools, residential builds and additionally critical infrastructure.

Calling for urgent action as the winter approaches the speaker described the weaponisation of winter, “for Ukrainians, winter is not simply a season, it is another test of survival, the test created by Russia.” In Olesky, 2000 civilians remain trapped without adequate food, electricity or medical care, throughout Ukraine civilians are increasingly suffering at the hands of the Russian Federation.

Lastly, the speaker requests support from the international community to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, strengthen air defence, support survivors and evacuation efforts, and ensure accountability. “No impunity for sexual violence, no weaponisation of hunger, darkness, or winter.

3. **Statements on behalf of a Group of States**

**Sweden on behalf of the Nordic Baltic Countries**



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, presented the oral statement on behalf of the Nordic Baltic countries. The statement reaffirmed the countries' unwavering solidarity and support for Ukrainian people, and Ukrainian independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. While representing the Nordic Baltic countries, Ms. Stenger demanded full accountability for the crimes committed in the context of Russia's war of aggression and urged all countries to join the appeal.

**The Council of Europe**




The representative of the Council of Europe highlighted that the Council of Europe Register of Damage caused by the Russian aggression completed the opening of all claim categories for compensation for damage, and loss or injury caused by the wrongful acts in or against Ukraine. The representative described that claims can be submitted in twenty-one categories for individuals, eleven categories for legal entities, and eleven categories for the state of Ukraine. She then stated that the register has so far received over 195,000 claims and 65,0000 of them have been reported, she states "behind them are human lives and the country shattered by war which awaits justice, redress and reparation. Without that, there can be no just and lasting peace."

Furthermore, the representative affirmed the Council of Europe's commitment to not let force take precedence over international law and called for swift ratification of the Convention on the International Claims Commission to enable adjudication of claims.

## 4. Relevant Oral Statement by Other Delegation

### The Russian Federation




The representative of the Russian Federation questioned the legitimacy of the report and the Human Rights Council, regarding the facts presented. They emphasised the database is on confidential sources that cannot be checked, and highlighted bare faced accusations without verifications.

He further emphasised Ukrainian violence against Russia, and stated that the report ignores that rapes and shootings of the Pérez village in Kirsk Oblast by the Ukarianians and in the Donetsk people's Republic. He calls into question the accuracy of the report and its effective documentation of Ukrainian criminal activity in the early stages of the war.

## 5. Statements by U.N Agencies

### United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)



The representative of UNICEF highlighted the devastating impact of the war and human rights violations on children in Ukraine. She warns that if violence on children continues at this rate child casualties could approach the level recorded in 2022, the first year of the full scale war.

The representative highlighted that the ongoing attacks on civilian infrastructure disrupt education and require children to move to shelters. She also mentioned UNICEF contacted warehouses that store critical humanitarian supplies for children have been destroyed, as well as a member of UNICEF was killed.

On behalf of UNICEF, the representative called for full compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and for the prevention and the end of all grave violations against children, and protection for civilian infrastructure and humanitarian personnel and facilities.

## 6. Statements by CSOs

Lastly, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) raised concerns regarding the continued human rights and humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine. Speakers highlighted increasing civilian casualties, attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure, conflict-related sexual violence, and restrictions on fundamental rights in occupied territories.

Particular concern was raised regarding the impact of the conflict on children and other vulnerable groups, including displacement, loss of access to education, psychological trauma, and exposure to violence. Speakers also emphasised the need for greater support for affected communities and survivors, including accessible humanitarian assistance and mental health services.

Accountability remained central throughout the statements. Organisations called for continued documentation and independent monitoring of violations, greater protection of civilians, accountability for perpetrators, and meaningful access to justice for victims. Several speakers further stressed the importance of diplomatic efforts toward ending the conflict while ensuring respect for international human rights and humanitarian law.

## 7. Concluding Remarks by the UNHCHR

The UNHCHR concluded by emphasising the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Ukraine, particularly the intensification of hostilities and their growing impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure. He reaffirmed the reliability of OHCHR's reporting and stressed that documented patterns of conflict-related sexual violence require independent investigations, preservation of evidence, accountability, and survivor-centred support. Particular concern was also raised regarding the treatment of prisoners of war and civilian detainees, with calls for their exchange or release and for independent monitors to be granted access to places of detention. Finally, the UNHCHR called for an end to attacks on civilian infrastructure, renewed access to occupied territories, and the protection of human rights and international law in any future peace agreement.

## V. Position of Geneva International Centre for Justice

**Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ)** aligns itself with the concerns raised by the High Commissioner and remains deeply concerned by the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Ukraine. The intensification of hostilities, rising civilian casualties, and continued attacks affecting civilian infrastructure demonstrate the devastating consequences of the conflict. **GICJ** stresses that civilians must be protected in accordance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

**GICJ** is particularly alarmed by the widespread patterns of conflict-related sexual violence documented throughout the conflict. Survivors must remain at the centre of justice and accountability efforts and have access to safe reporting mechanisms, trauma-informed investigations, psychosocial assistance, legal services, and effective remedies. Reports of sexual violence, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment must be independently investigated, and those responsible must be held accountable.

**GICJ** further calls for the humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilian detainees and stresses the urgent need for independent monitors to be granted access to all places of detention. Arbitrarily detained civilians must be released, while prisoners of war must be treated in accordance with the protections guaranteed under Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949.

Finally, **GICJ** reiterates that lasting peace cannot be achieved without accountability and respect for international law. Any efforts toward peace must prioritise the protection and rights of civilians, including those living in occupied territories, while ensuring meaningful access to justice for victims and survivors. The international community must continue to support independent monitoring, documentation, accountability mechanisms, and efforts towards a just and lasting peace in Ukraine.




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