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Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, submitted in accordance with paragraph 27 of Human Rights Council resolution 58/24, on the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.

Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

Summary

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine submits the present report to the 80th session of the General Assembly.

The Commission's latest investigations have established that in two types of situations, Russian authorities have systematically coordinated actions in order to drive out Ukrainian civilians from their place of residence.

First, the evidence collected demonstrates that recurrent attacks with short-range drones by Russian armed forces against civilians in frontline areas have killed and injured many, caused large-scale destruction, and created a coercive environment compelling thousands to flee. The Commission has concluded that these acts amount to the crimes against humanity of murder and of forcible transfer of population. Second, the Commission has also found that deportations and transfers of civilians from areas occupied by Russian authorities constitute war crimes.

For over one year, Russian armed forces have been directing drone attacks against an extensive range of civilian targets, in an area spanning over 300 kilometres along the right bank of the Dnipro River, across Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts. The attacks targeted civilian persons, houses or buildings, humanitarian distribution points, and critical energy infrastructure servicing civilians. They even hit first responders – including ambulances and fire brigades, regardless of their special protection under international humanitarian law, obstructing their intervention. Many of the attacks struck the same objects repeatedly, deliberately setting them on fire. Residents of the targeted localities described life conditions as unbearable. A man stated, *"we are hit every day, drones fly at any time - morning, evening, day or night, constantly"*.

The cases documented demonstrate that military units of Russian armed forces deployed over a large geographic area and operating from the left bank of the Dnipro River, under a centralized command, have used the same modus operandi to intentionally target civilians and civilian objects and cause harm and destruction.

Consistent with the findings outlined in its May 2025 conference room paper, the Commission has concluded that Russian armed forces' short-range drone attacks, in a wider geographic area than previously established, amount to the crime against humanity of murder and the war crimes of intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects. The Commission has further concluded that these attacks were committed as part of a coordinated policy to drive out civilians from those territories and amount to the crime against humanity of forcible transfer of population. The attacks have spread terror among the civilian population and violated the human right to life and other fundamental human rights.

As regards the second issue investigated, the Commission has documented that Russian authorities have coordinated actions to deport or transfer civilians from areas that came under their control in Zaporizhzhia Oblast. This amounts to war crimes.

In 2022 and 2023, Russian authorities transferred civilians to territories under Ukrainian Government control, after accusing them of carrying out activities against the Russian Federation. They brought the victims to a checkpoint then positioned at the end of the area they controlled. There, they forced them to walk through a 10 to 15 km-wide highly dangerous operational area to reach the Ukrainian checkpoint.

In 2024 and 2025, Russian authorities deported Ukrainian civilians from occupied areas in Zaporizhzhia Oblast to Georgia, referring to Russian Federation legislation on the legal status of certain categories of foreign citizens. Perpetrators transported them to the border between the Russian Federation and Georgia and ordered them to cross.

With respect to both deportations and transfers, perpetrators usually detained the victims, subjected some of them to torture, and confiscated their documents and belongings. These acts have inflicted severe mental pain and suffering and amount to inhuman treatment as a war crime and a violation of human rights.

The circumstances of the documented cases demonstrate a profound disregard for human life and dignity. Many of the victims have endured physical trauma and all reported psychological shock. The victims have been forced to separate, at times on very short notice, or no notice at all, from their families, residences, work, and belongings. They described an unbearable feeling of having lost everything and having to restart their lives from scratch. Victims felt acute anguish for the members of their families who were left behind.

The Commission also examined allegations by Russian authorities of drone attacks by Ukrainian armed forces against civilian targets in Russian occupied areas. It was unable to conclude its investigation due to lack of access to the territory, concerns relating to the safety of witnesses, and in the absence of response to its questions to the Russian authorities.

I. Introduction

1. In April 2025, the Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine through resolution 58/24.¹ The Commission is composed of Erik Møse (Chair), Pablo de Greiff, and Vrinda Grover.
2. The Commission's work is guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, and integrity. It adopts a victim-centred approach and a strict respect of the "do no harm" principle.
3. The present report to the General Assembly is to be read in conjunction with the Commission's May 2025 conference room paper.² The Commission travelled to Ukraine and relied on interviews with 226 persons (117 women and 109 men), including victims, witnesses, local authorities, medical personnel, first responders, humanitarian workers, local organisations, and experts. In addition, it has examined over 500 publicly available videos of crimes described in this report, of which it geolocated 247, as well as photographs, satellite imagery, and relevant documents.
4. The Commission expresses its gratitude to all those who shared valuable information. It appreciates the cooperation of the Government of Ukraine. The Russian Federation continued not to recognise the Commission and 35 written requests for access, information, and meetings, remained unanswered.

II. Overview

5. Over three years of armed conflict had a devastating toll on civilian life and population in Ukraine. This is particularly the case in frontline areas, where 69 per cent of the civilian casualties have occurred, according to the recent update of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).³ The Commission has continued to document grave crimes and corresponding human rights violations. Its recent investigations focused on areas in the vicinity of the Dnipro River and on occupied areas. The Commission found that in two types of situation, Russian military and civilian authorities have systematically coordinated actions to drive out the Ukrainian civilian population.
6. The frontline along the Dnipro River has been largely static for almost three years. The Russian armed forces have carried out attacks with short-range drones on the right bank of the river, which is under Ukrainian Government control, with full disregard for the civilian population, killing and injuring civilians and causing damage and destruction. The ensuing coercive environment compelled thousands of civilians to flee. The Commission has concluded that the Russian armed forces have committed the crime against humanity of forcible transfer of populations (see part A).⁴
7. In areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast which came under Russian control, Russian authorities have coordinated actions to deport or transfer civilian persons to third states or to territories under Ukrainian Government control. These acts demonstrate that the Russian authorities have driven civilian persons from their places of residence and amount to war crimes (see part B).⁵

¹ A/HRC/RES/58/24.

² A/HRC/59/CRP.2.

³ OHCHR Update, September 2025.

⁴ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 7(1)(d).

⁵ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8(2)(a)(vii).

III. Drone attacks against civilian targets and deportations and transfers

A. Drone attacks against civilian targets on the right bank of the Dnipro River

8. In its May 2025 conference room paper, the Commission concluded that widespread and systematic drone attacks against civilians, in an area stretching over 100 km in Kherson Oblast, amount to the crime against humanity of murder, the war crimes of attacking civilians and of outrages upon personal dignity, and that they have been committed with the primary purpose to spread terror among the civilian population.⁶ At the time of the publication of the present report, Russian armed forces continued to attack civilians with remotely piloted short-range drones in the Ukrainian-controlled right bank of Dnipro River, in Kherson Oblast.

9. Building on its previous findings, the Commission's new investigations show that Russian armed forces have used drones to target civilians in a much larger area than previously reported. It stretches over 300 km along the Dnipro River and over the Dnipro Gulf, across Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts. In this area, the river generally constitutes a natural separation between both forces. In addition to attacking persons, Russian armed forces have relentlessly struck a wide array of civilian objects with drones, including civilian houses, buildings, gathering points, humanitarian distribution points, and objects of critical infrastructure that service civilians. The attacks have often targeted the same objects repeatedly, and have even released flammable substances, causing fires and large-scale destruction. Drone operators have attacked first responders – ambulance crews, fire brigades, and their vehicles, regardless of their special protection under international humanitarian law,⁷ as well as repair crews.

10. These attacks with drones have continued for over one year and have intensified in 2025. According to OHCHR's latest updates, attacks with short-range drones near the frontline became the leading cause of civilian casualties.⁸ According to local authorities, since July 2024, over 200 civilians have been killed and over 2,000 civilians were injured in such attacks in the three oblasts; most victims are men. Almost 3,000 houses have been damaged or destroyed, also by drones.

11. Russian military units deployed on the occupied left bank of the Dnipro River have committed the attacks. The Commission has identified several drone units, their operators, and associated military units and commanders, as well as other persons cooperating with them. All the types of short-range drones used in these attacks are equipped with live streaming cameras that focus on particular targets, leaving no doubt about the knowledge and intent of the perpetrators. Russian Telegram channels have continued to disseminate videos of the attacks, as well as mocking text posts with threats of further attacks.

12. The documented cases demonstrate the intention of the perpetrators to kill and inflict harm and large-scale destruction. The attacks have spread terror among the population and have rendered civilian life unbearable. Entire localities have suffered heavy structural damage and have been temporarily or permanently deprived of services and basic utilities, as well as of any form of emergency support when it is most needed. A woman from a particularly affected area noted, *"It is a lottery – will a drone fly in or not? You go to bed and you don't know if you will be killed or wake up in the morning."* Survivors invoked psychological trauma and fear. The ensuing coercive environment has compelled thousands to leave.

13. The Commission has also investigated allegations by Russian authorities of drone attacks committed in Russian-occupied areas but has been unable to conclude its investigations due to lack of access to the territory, concerns relating to the safety of

⁶ A/HRC/59/CRP.2.

⁷ Geneva Convention IV, arts. 18-19; Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 61.

⁸ OHCHR, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, September 2025; OHCHR, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2025.

witnesses, and in the absence of response to its questions addressed to the Russian Federation.

1. Attacks against a wide array of civilian targets

14. Russian armed forces have continued to attack civilians with drones on the right bank of Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast. They chased them, at times over long distances, while they were near their houses or in the street, on foot or using transport, and dropped explosives on them or struck them with suicide drones. In addition, the Commission found new evidence that Russian armed forces have committed attacks using the same tactic against civilians in waterfront localities of Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv oblasts. According to residents, in certain areas, the attacks have intensified since the publication of the Commission's May 2025 report. Victims and witnesses pointed to drones flying even when the weather is bad, at night, and increasingly striking in localities further away from the river front. In July 2025, a resident stated, *"we don't have a day without injuries in Kherson"*.

15. In the three oblasts, drone operators have targeted, in addition to civilian persons, a wide array of civilian objects and critical infrastructure, as well as first responders and repair crews. These findings provide further evidence of the widespread and systematic character of the attacks.

16. Telegram channels run by perpetrating units or by persons close to them have continued to post videos of drone attacks on a broad range of targets that bear no indication of being other than civilian. Text posts on these channels have announced an expansion of the targeted areas and exhorted the civilian population to leave. In May 2025, for instance, a Telegram channel posted a map of Kherson city and stated, *"Kherson. Red zone. Friends, great news! From now on, each sector is unique and has specific tasks and designated teams. The city will be dismantled – brick after brick – thanks to the successful 404⁹ command leadership. Stay tuned for updates."* In June 2025, a video showing a drone flying towards an electric substation, followed by a fire, came with the text, *"[...] Substations are being totally destroyed, maximum damage is being inflicted. The strike zone will expand along the borders of the region, the number will increase several times.[...]"*.

17. The Commission's investigations found no indication of military presence at or in proximity to the targeted locations. The fact that drone operators carry out extensive observation of the affected areas allows them to identify the civilian character of their targets.

2. Attacks against residential houses and apartment buildings

18. The Commission has interviewed multiple witnesses of drone attacks on residential houses and apartment buildings in the affected localities and has reviewed videos of attacks posted on Russian Telegram channels. Drones hit roofs, windows, or balconies and often set the houses on fire. First responders and repair crews, themselves targeted by drones, were often unable to intervene (see paras. 29-33). The attacks led to the damage or destruction of civilian residences; civilians present were killed or suffered from fractures, cuts, concussions, and burns, some of them with long-term consequences. Common elements of the investigated situations demonstrate that perpetrators intended to hit, damage, and destroy civilian residences: often, drones struck merely after spotting signs of movement around civilian residences; frequently, several drones attacked the same house, together or in sequence; and many of the attacks were clearly intended to cause fires.

19. Drones often hovered over the targeted areas for prolonged periods of time, observing. Victims and witnesses stated that at the time when drones hit their houses, they were engaged in ordinary activities such as spending time in their yards, gardening, caring for their animals, disposing of trash, or parking their vehicles. A woman said, *"There are attacks on houses, roofs. If they see that there are people living here, see something in the yard, then there will definitely be a drone strike"*. She added that she cannot hang her laundry outside, because this will show that *"there are people living here"*. In a video interview by the Russian media

⁹ 404 is a derogatory formulation sometimes used by Russian authorities and media to refer to Ukraine.

in February 2024, drone operators focusing on Kherson Oblast noted that they observe all territories and destroy what could hinder them.

20. In some cases, drones pursued civilians to their homes and then attacked the houses. A woman from Veletenske village, Kherson Oblast, stated that in August 2024, she was parking her car at her home and noticed a drone above her head. She sought refuge in the garage, but the drone dropped an explosive that hit the roof and injured her. She suffered a concussion, cuts, and was temporarily deafened as a result of the blast. Later the same day, two more drones hit her house and badly damaged it. She moved out after the incident.

21. Perpetrators frequently attacked the same house or apartment with several drones in a coordinated sequence, or slammed two or more suicide drones into the houses. In many of the investigated situations, a first drone pierced a hole on the roof and a second one dropped an explosive through it, causing fires. Additional drones hovered over the area and obstructed efforts to extinguish them. According to local authorities, witnesses, and first responders, some drones carried improvised incendiary mixtures in a bottle that they dropped during attacks, causing strong fires. A local authority from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast stated that such fires are *“impossible to put out”*.

22. A woman from Dobra Nadiia village, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, told the Commission that on 8 July 2025, a drone flew into her house through the window and dropped an incendiary device that lit a fire. She was then on her way to work, while her 60-year-old mother was working in the garden. The neighbours alerted her; she returned home immediately, and they tried to extinguish the fire. However, it spread quickly and another drone flew over, preventing their efforts. She stated, *“drones do not allow us to put out fires – they keep watch, and they will drop an explosive on people”*.

23. A 47-year-old woman from Dniprovske village, Mykolaiv Oblast, reported that drones had struck her house on three occasions, and an ensuing fire destroyed it. She described herself as homeless as a result. A first attack damaged three windows. During a second attack, the drone did not explode and was successfully removed. A third attack occurred in her absence, in August 2025. Her neighbour told the Commission that she heard the drone flying, followed by a loud explosion. She tried to put out the fire, together with other neighbours, using buckets of water, without success. She stated, *“I saw the house burn down in front of my eyes and there was nothing I could do”*.

24. Videos of attacks on houses posted on Russian Telegram channels show drones dropping explosives or suicide drones slamming into houses, followed by one or more observer drones filming the fires. One such video was posted in December 2024, with the message, *“We burnt another house”* with a derogatory pig nose icon.

3. Attacks against non-residential civilian buildings and civilian gathering points

25. The Commission has investigated incidents in which drone operators targeted non-residential civilian buildings, their grounds, and gathering points for civilians. These include hospitals, other medical facilities, and humanitarian personnel,¹⁰ that have special protection under international humanitarian law, as well as a school, a market, and civil administration buildings. The attacks led to injuries and deaths among civilians, and to temporary or permanent disruptions of the services provided in these places, thereby severely affecting the civilian population.

26. A local authority from Illinka village, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, told the Commission that in June 2025, a rural medical point had been struck and destroyed by a drone (see para. 30). A doctor working in a hospital in Kherson Oblast reported that drone attacks hit the hospital and its immediate vicinity on several occasions in 2025, damaging the electrical power lines and the gas boiler. When drones flew too close, the medical staff were forced to interrupt the work and take shelter.

27. According to residents of a village in Kherson Oblast, attacks with drones targeted several times a “point of invincibility” – the only service that was still available in the village. Civilians gathered there to recharge phones, torches, and connect to the internet.

¹⁰ Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 71.

28. Humanitarian distribution points and personnel, organized after the closure of numerous shops, have also been attacked with drones. A woman from Solonchaky village, Mykolaiv Oblast, told the Commission that in November 2024, a drone dropped an explosive in an area where civilians had gathered to receive humanitarian aid. Six civilians, including one woman and five men, were injured following the explosion. One of them, a 30-year-old man who was distributing aid, died from his injuries. One of the witnesses stated that some shrapnel remains in her hand since that day.

4. Attacks against first responders

29. Attacks with drones have recurrently targeted teams of first responders: medical staff and fire brigades, as well as ambulances and fire engines, regardless of visible distinctive marks on vehicles and their special protection under international humanitarian law. The attacks occurred at their workplaces, on the road, and during interventions, and resulted in injuries and deaths of personnel, as well as damage or destruction of specialized vehicles. First responders have often been unable to reach those in need, because of the permanent risks, or the reduced availability of personnel and vehicles. This deprived the population from emergency response where it was most needed. A resident of Kherson city stated, *"It is 'a red zone' and drones attack any transport. Police, State Emergency services, the fire brigade – if they came, a drone would attack immediately."* Civilians have often taken upon themselves to organise evacuations of the injured and attempt to put out fires, but they have also been targeted.

30. The head of a fire brigade in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast reported that in June 2025, he drove with his team to extinguish a fire at a rural medical point in Illinka village that had been hit by drones. On the site, a drone dropped a grenade that damaged the fire engine, despite it bearing distinctive visible marks (see para. 26).

31. The head of an ambulance service in Kherson Oblast explained that most of their ambulances had been hit by drones, and others by artillery. In July 2025, an ambulance that had been repaired managed to operate for only 12 days until it was hit and damaged again.

32. Russian Telegram channels have posted videos showing attacks against first responders often accompanied by the following threatening text or variants thereof, *"[...] We warn all special services involved in erasing the consequences [of attacks]. You will become a priority target. Guaranteed."*

33. In the absence of ambulances, civilians injured in attacks usually attempt to reach the closest point where they can receive first aid. A man from Antonivka Settlement, Kherson Oblast, who was injured by drones attacking his house stated that he had to walk for about two hours, covered in blood, to a place where an ambulance could pick him up.

5. Attacks against critical infrastructure

34. In the same localities, attacks with drones have regularly targeted electric substations, transformers, generators, gas installations, water installations, wind turbines, and mobile communication towers that serviced civilians. This led to electricity, water, and gas supply cuts of variable duration. Multiple posts uploaded by perpetrators or persons close to them on Russian Telegram channels demonstrate that critical infrastructure has been a priority target. The text *"[...] All objects of critical infrastructure are a legitimate target. [...]"* was repeatedly disseminated, as well as videos showing and claiming attacks on various such objects.

35. Residents from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast testified about drone attacks targeting electrical transformers, sometimes leading to their full destruction. This has forced them to seek alternative sources of energy. In August 2024, the head of a fire brigade was inspecting an unexploded drone that landed on a transformer, when more drones flew in and hit the transformer, setting it on fire. He was forced to hide under the transformer and was injured. He recounted that it took the firefighters almost a whole day to put out the ensuing fire.

36. Drone attacks have targeted wind turbines. Two videos disseminated by Russian Telegram channels in June 2025 show drones aiming at the motor compartment of wind turbines. The video stops as the drones are about to hit, which is typical of suicide drones.

One of them was posted with the text, *“Minus one more wind turbine. The guys worked well. Work, brothers.”*

37. In locations affected by electricity and water cuts, generators have been vital, both to provide power and to pump water. However, they have also been regularly targeted by drones. A woman from Kherson Oblast stated, *“We hid the generators. If you left it in the middle of the yard, it would definitely be hit by a drone”*.

38. Repairs of critical infrastructure installations in the aftermath of attacks have often been difficult or impossible, as drone attacks targeted repair crews. Residents attempted repairs but even they faced the dangers of drone attacks. A man from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast noted that drones come within 15 - 20 minutes if they observe repair works.

6. Perpetrators

39. The attacks have been committed by drone units of the Russian armed forces based on the left bank of Dnipro River, which is currently under Russian control, in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. Civilians who used to live in these localities stated that many fled after Russian armed forces deployed there. They said that Russian soldiers occupied vacant houses, placed military equipment between civilian buildings, and operated drones from within civilian residences or administrative buildings, hospitals and schools.

40. The Commission has identified individual drone operators and drone units deployed on the left bank of the river. Some of them have regularly disseminated videos showing drone attacks against civilians via Telegram channels. They are affiliated with various army units all of which are part of the “Dnepr” Group of Forces commanded by Colonel General Mikhail Teplinsky, who reports directly to the Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov, the commander of all Russian troops operating in Ukraine. The “Dnepr” Group of Forces has an area of operations covering parts of the Kherson, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts that are along the Dnipro River. In July 2025, during a visit of the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation to the Headquarters of the Group of Forces, Teplinsky briefed him about the implementation of a drone control system that allowed the group of forces to use drones *“according to a unified plan, reduce their losses, and also keep track of their usage”*.

41. Moreover, witnesses and local authorities from some of the targeted localities in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast reported that the drones came from the direction of or from within the proximity of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which was seized by the Russian Federation in 2022.¹¹ This is in violation of international humanitarian law, that prescribes that armed forces shall endeavour to avoid locating any military objectives in the vicinity of nuclear stations.¹² One resident of Nikopol city, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, stated, *“they know that nobody will shoot at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant”*.

42. Among civil authorities appointed by the Russian Federation to the occupied areas, Volodymyr Saldo, the so-called “Governor” of the occupied areas of Kherson Oblast, has been actively supporting military units using drones on the frontlines in Kherson Oblast. In September 2024, Saldo posted photos and text on his own Telegram channel stating that he handed over drones to military personnel operating on the left bank of Kherson Oblast. In 2025, also on his Telegram channel, Saldo posted updates about his support to a particular drone unit operating in the north of Kherson, as well as recruitment advertisements for this unit, under the heading *“Make Kherson’s history already today!”*. In 2023 and 2025, he also reported on his Telegram channel about his visits to drone factories. During one such visit in 2023, he discussed the delivery of drones and their possible production directly in Kherson Oblast, while in 2025, he noted that drones produced by the factory are now *“working en masse on the front lines - in the area of responsibility of the ‘Dnepr’ troop grouping”*.

7. Types of drones used in attacks

43. There have been continuous innovations in the field of drones used during the armed conflict in Ukraine. Based on the testimony of local authorities and first responders, as well

¹¹ A/HRC/52/CRP.4, paras. 74, 245, and 288.

¹² Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 56(5).

as on videos and photographs shared by witnesses and on Russian media or Telegram channels, Russian armed forces have used several types of small, short-range, and low-cost drones to hit civilians in the areas investigated. The models documented allow real time observation and selection of targets via an embedded camera. Some of them have first-person view equipment that allows the operators to see from the perspective of the drones.

44. Drones of the Chinese Da-Jiang Innovations (DJI) company are frequently cited, in particular the Mavic 3 type quadcopter series that are produced for civilian use but modified to enable the dropping of explosives. DJI has declared that its products are not designed for military applications and stated that it suspended all commercial activities in the Russian Federation and Ukraine in light of the ongoing hostilities, and contractually forbade any sales by dealers to either country and for combat use.¹³ The Commission has addressed questions on this matter to the company.

45. Suicide drones that explode upon impact have been more commonly reported throughout 2025, in connection with such attacks, notably the VT-40 quadcopter drone and the fixed-wing Molniya drone. Both are Russian produced. Various types of explosives are usually attached to drones, including grenades, mortar rounds, RPG-7 cartridges, butterfly mines, repurposed anti-tank mines, as well as improvised flammable or explosive substances.

8. Drone attacks in areas controlled by Russian armed forces

46. The Commission has attempted to verify allegations, as reported by Russian authorities, of drone attacks in areas that are under Russian armed forces control on the left bank of the Dnipro River. The Commission has addressed letters to the Russian Federation, has reviewed information posted online, and has interviewed residents from the relevant areas in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, provided that they were in safe conditions. All of the interlocutors interviewed had left the areas concerned and had not directly witnessed attacks with drones on civilian targets. Due to lack of access to the territory, concerns relating to the safety of witnesses, and in the absence of response to its questions to the Russian Federation, the Commission has not obtained a sufficient evidentiary basis to draw conclusions from its investigations (see para. 13).

9. Consequences for the civilian population

47. Drone attacks in the three affected oblasts have a devastating impact on civilians. The rampant presence of drones pursuing and striking civilians has not only led to deaths and injuries, but has also created a permanent climate of terror and large-scale destruction. Although different localities have been affected to varying degrees, and some of the destruction was a result of the combined action of drones and artillery, the systematic attacks targeting civilian objects with drones has taken a heavy toll. Drone attacks have caused significant structural and permanent damage in most of the investigated localities. The attacks that triggered fires have been frequent and particularly destructive. Survivors reported loss of homes, livelihoods, and belongings; they suffered a deep psychological shock, a traumatic feeling of having lost everything. A local authority who inspected the aftermath of a drone attack, stated, *“people are left with nothing after such fire – everything they own is destroyed”*.

48. Drone attacks have severely affected services. Most shops, pharmacies, transport, and medical facilities have had to close. Systematic attacks on critical infrastructure have temporarily or permanently deprived civilians of electricity, water, gas, and internet connection. Drone attacks against first responders have prevented them from reaching those in need. A local authority noted, *“we cannot provide [...] any normal services – the village council; the state emergency services; ambulances; fire brigades”*.

49. These attacks have rendered life in the affected localities unbearable and compelled thousands to leave. Interlocutors invoked fear, stress, permanent risks, and therefore, the impossibility to live in such conditions. A humanitarian worker stated, *“we can’t take it*

¹³ See Da-Jiang Innovations, Statement On Military Use Of Drones, 21 April 2022; Da-Jiang Innovations, Reassesses Sales Compliance Efforts In Light Of Current Hostilities, 26 April 2022. See also A/HRC/59/CRP.2, para. 51-52.

anymore; it is getting worse and more frightening". Residents of the targeted localities pointed out that even if they had initially chosen to stay, despite of the gravity of the situation and the constant risks, drone attacks on their houses had been decisive in causing them to leave, as they had lost everything.

50. Local authorities reported a sharp decrease of the population as a consequence of the drone attacks; and that some areas have been almost entirely vacated. Those who remained are mainly older people, those with reduced mobility, those who have no means to leave, or those who had to take care of relatives or properties. According to a humanitarian worker now even they started to leave.

10. Concluding observations

51. Recurrent drone attacks carried out by the Russian armed forces have been directed at an extensive range of civilian targets in areas stretching over 300 kilometres, across Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, and Mykolaiv oblasts. The attacks have killed and injured civilians, including first responders, and have caused large-scale damage and destruction. The duration, frequency and the geographic spread of the attacks confirm that they are part of a pattern and have been widespread and systematic. Drone units based in a wide geographic area along the left bank of the Dnipro River have carried out such attacks using the same *modus operandi*, which demonstrates that they acted pursuant to an organisational policy.

52. In continuance of its previous findings, the Commission concludes that drone attacks against civilians, in a much wider geographic area than previously established, amount to the crime against humanity of murder,¹⁴ the war crimes of intentionally directing attacks against civilians¹⁵ and civilian objects¹⁶. Further, launching attacks from the vicinity of a nuclear power plant is in violation of international humanitarian law. These attacks also violate a series of fundamental human rights, amongst others, the right to life.¹⁷

53. The drone attacks against civilians have created a coercive environment. They were committed with the primary purpose to spread terror among the civilian population.¹⁸ They wreaked large-scale destruction and disrupted permanently or temporarily basic services, as well as supply of electricity, gas, and water, rendering the concerned localities unliveable. The recurrence of such drone attacks against a broad range of civilian targets, by various units acting under a unified command, over a long period of time, left the population with no choice but to flee and hampered the return of those who have fled.

54. This demonstrates that these attacks have been intentional and part of a coordinated policy to drive civilians out of those territories. The Commission thus concludes that the conduct of the Russian armed forces amounts to the crime against humanity of forcible transfer of populations.¹⁹

B. Deportations and transfers of civilians from the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast

55. Since its establishment in 2022, the Commission has documented different situations in which Russian authorities have deported or transferred civilians, adults and children, from territories that came under their control in Ukraine.²⁰ During recent investigations, it has focused on deportations and transfers of adult civilians, men and women, from the Russian occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. According to the Russian authorities, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, together with Donetsk, Kherson, and Luhansk oblasts, became part of the Russian

¹⁴ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 7(1)(a).

¹⁵ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8(2)(b)(i).

¹⁶ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8(2)(b)(ii).

¹⁷ International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, art. 6.

¹⁸ Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 51(2).

¹⁹ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 7(1)(d); see for example ICC, The Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda, Judgment, Case No. ICC-01/04-02/06, 8 July 2019, paras. 1056, 1060, 1061, and 1067.

²⁰ A/HRC/52/CRP.4, paras. 513-518; 715-772.

Federation following the so-called “treaties on accession” of 30 September 2022.²¹ Such annexation of territories is illegal under international law and has been widely condemned.²²

56. In 2022 and 2023, Russian authorities in occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast engaged in repeated instances of transfers of civilian adults to territories under Ukrainian Government control, through the Vasylivka checkpoint, which then marked the end of the Russian-controlled areas in the northern part of the oblast. At the checkpoint, Russian military officers read out an order of transfer addressed to the victims, as a punitive measure for alleged activities against the Russian Federation. They directed them to proceed on foot through a 10 to 15 km-long operational area, highly dangerous for civilians. The Russian press and Telegram channels have disseminated multiple videos, photos, and articles showing the victims being transferred.

57. In 2024 and 2025, Russian authorities have deported civilian adults to Georgia, via the Russian Federation, from the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast.²³ The perpetrators read or handed over deportation orders that refer to a decision not to allow “entry into the Russian Federation” for periods averaging 20 to 40 years. The Russian authorities then transported the victims to the Verkhniy Lars border crossing between the Russian Federation and Georgia and ordered them to cross.

58. Arrests, detentions, various forms of violence – sometimes including torture – searches, confiscations of documents and property, preceded the transfers or deportations. Victims were deported or transferred at very short notice, or without any prior notice, and thereby separated from all aspects of their daily lives, including families, homes, work, and belongings. They had to restart their life from scratch, while they dealt with deep psychological trauma.

59. In the commission of these acts, security and other authorities of the Russian Federation in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast have acted in a coordinated manner. Already in July 2022, Yevhen Balytskyi, then the Russian appointed “head of the temporary civil-military occupation administration” of the occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, issued a decree containing a list of prohibited manifestations of extremist activities punishable with forcible expulsion. These included: obstructing the work of the civil-military administrations or the referendum commissions, discrediting the authorities of the Russian Federation, disseminating false information about the authorities of the Russian Federation.²⁴ On 24 February 2024, in an interview with the Russian media, Balytskyi, presently the Russian-appointed so-called “Governor” of the occupied areas of the oblast, stated, “*We evicted a large number of families. [...] We evicted those who, in one way or another, didn’t support the “Special Military Operation”, those who insulted the flag, the Russian anthem, the president of the Russian Federation. [...] We evicted entire families because we understood that these are people we couldn’t convince and that we would have to deal with them in an even tougher manner.*”

1. Transfers to territories under Ukrainian Government control

60. In 2022 and 2023, Russian authorities transferred men and women across different professions, backgrounds, and ages from the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast to territories under Ukrainian Government control. The Russian authorities accused them of failing to cooperate, carrying out activities considered as destabilizing, or having a pro-Ukrainian position.

61. According to the victims and witnesses, members of the Federal Security Service or other Russian authorities arrested, detained, and interrogated them for periods of varying duration before the transfers. They searched their houses and confiscated documents, money, phones, vehicles, house keys, and other belongings. Many victims were subjected to violence

²¹ See Russian Federation, “Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Zaporizhzhia Region on the admission of the Zaporizhzhia Region to the Russian Federation and the formation of a new subject within the Russian Federation”, 30 September 2022.

²² A/HRC/52/CRP.4, para. 678.

²³ According to Ukrainian authorities, by 2025 the Ukrainian Embassy in Georgia has received more than 540 appeals of civilians who reported to have been deported from Ukraine.

²⁴ Volodymyr Saldo (see para. 42) signed a similar decree for Kherson Oblast.

or threats of violence, and were coerced to sign pre-printed or dictated documents or make self-incriminating declarations on camera. A victim of transfer stated that during his detention, an investigator instructed him to sign a document addressed to Balytskyi, stating, *"I do not agree with the referendum and do not want this territory to be the Russian Federation."* In another case, interrogators ordered a detained victim to write a letter to Balytskyi noting, *"I am refusing to take a Russian passport and to support the Russian Federation. I am supporting Ukraine"*.

62. After different periods of detention, Russian authorities blindfolded the victims, individually or in small groups, and transported them to the Vasylivka checkpoint (see para. 55). Various Russian authorities were present there. A Russian military officer read out a printed order, stating that the *"expulsion from the Russian Federation"* had been decided as a punitive measure on such grounds as *"discrediting the Russian Federation"*, or *"carrying out subversive activities"*, or *"acting against the Russian Government"*. One of the orders even mentioned *"lying on the internet"* as a reason for expulsion.

63. The transfers occurred in a coercive and dangerous environment. A victim reported that the Russian officer told him to stay close to a ditch, remarking, *"we don't want to carry you when you will be shot"*, to scare him, and then ordered him to proceed. The victims had to walk through a "grey zone" averaging 10 to 15 km to reach the territory under Ukrainian Government control, in an operational area with landmines, trenches, and while hearing shots and shelling nearby. Some went missing following transfers. In several cases, the Russian authorities staged the transfer, but instead transported the victims to Verkhnia Krynytsia village nearby, which was under Russian control, and subjected them to forced labour.²⁵

64. Victims noted the presence of representatives of Russian media at the checkpoint. The Russian press and Telegram channels have disseminated articles, photos and videos concerning such transfers. The Commission has collected and examined open-source material showing the victims and Russian officers wearing masks and reading transfer orders, in a location identifiable as the Vasylivka checkpoint. One victim even recounted that the scene had to be repeated, so that the journalists could record it.

2. Deportations

65. In 2024 and 2025, Russian authorities in occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast have coordinated actions to deport civilian adult men and women across various professions, backgrounds, and ages to Georgia, via the Russian Federation. The perpetrators accused the victims of refusing to cooperate with the Russian authorities, refusing to acquire a Russian passport, or of holding pro-Ukrainian views.

66. Prior to the deportations, members of the Federal Security Service and other Russian authorities usually arrested and detained the victims. In several cases, the Russian authorities staged curfew violations: they brought the victims to public places after the curfew time, where the police drew up charges of curfew violations. Thereafter, local judges pronounced administrative sanctions of detention in standardized judicial decisions. The Russian authorities often repeated the same sequence of actions, leading to additional sanctions for curfew violations.

67. The Russian authorities searched the victims' homes and confiscated their identity documents and other belongings. In some cases, they forced the victims to sign documents stating that they refuse to apply for a Russian passport because of their political views. Left with no documents, they felt compelled to apply for Russian passports. However, in situations where the documents had been confiscated by security services, the application process did not yield results. Therefore, the victims remained without any nationality documents.

68. The deportations were ordered by the so-called "Directorate for Migration Affairs of the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia for Zaporozhye Region", established in 2023 by the Russian Federation. On the day of the deportations, Russian authorities took the victims to the "Directorate for Migration Affairs". Usually, the authorities did not give the victims prior notice of the deportations. In most cases, they

²⁵ A/HRC/58/67, para. 22.

notified the deportation decisions with immediate effect, at the “Directorate for Migration Affairs”, or during detention or house searches.

69. The Commission has obtained copies of deportation decisions approved by senior officials of the so-called “Ministry of Internal Affairs”, including the heads of the “Main Directorate” and of the “Directorate for Migration Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs”, and has identified these individuals.²⁶ The documents refer to prior decisions by the Federal Security Service not to permit entry of the victims, Ukrainian citizens, into “the Russian Federation” for periods averaging 20 to 40 years. They communicated the decision to deport the victims “from the territory of the Russian Federation” – while referring to the areas the Russian authorities have occupied in Ukraine. The decisions invoke the Russian Federation legislation on the “*legal status of certain categories of foreign citizens or stateless persons in the Russian Federation*”.

70. Apart from these documents, the Russian authorities generally refused to communicate the reasons behind the deportations. A woman asked armed men who stormed her apartment, arrested her, and informed her of the upcoming deportation, about the reason. They responded, “*You were born in the wrong place*”.

71. Employees of the “Directorate for Migration Affairs” and other Russian authorities organized transport and escorted groups of victims to the Verkhniy Lars border crossing from the Russian Federation to Georgia. At the international border, they ordered the victims to cross over. The Russian authorities generally returned the previously confiscated Ukrainian documents at that time. However, they did not do so in all cases, and victims crossing without documents faced additional difficulties.

72. The deportations occurred in a threatening environment. A man who had been deported stated that at the border crossing, a member of the deportation convoy warned him, “*Go and better not come back. We have people who will not be free anytime soon. And some disappear altogether, and no one will find them. Be glad that you are coming out alive and well. It is not always like that, believe me.*” A woman who had been deported stated that at the crossing point a man of the convoy took her aside and told her, “*Greetings from FSB.*²⁷ *You are not dumb, and if you return, you will get a bullet to your head*”.

3. Impact

73. Russian authorities who carried out the deportations and transfers often gave the victims very short notice, or no notice at all, giving them no opportunity to pack or even call their families before being taken away. The perpetrators generally returned the identification documents of the victims at time of the transfer or deportation, but this was not always the case. In some situations, they confiscated passports, keys to houses or cars, and phones.

74. Victims of deportations and transfers recounted the traumatizing character of having to restart their life from scratch. Those who had been deported faced additional challenges related to their arrival in a foreign country with almost nothing. Some of them only had documents and a phone, others did not even have that. They had to apply for documents, find urgent ways to survive; some had no choice but to work illegally; many relied on help from volunteer organisations. Some returned to Ukraine, others travelled to Europe, and yet others chose to remain in Georgia for the time being.

75. All victims expressed grave concern for their families in the occupied areas of Ukraine, with whom they have only scarce or indirect contact because of security reasons. Some of the victims have learnt that Russian authorities had occupied their houses or affixed notices stating “ownerless”. They are unable to claim their properties as this would require travel to the occupied area from which they have been deported or transferred without a right to return.

²⁶ The Ukrainian authorities issued notices of suspicion against several involved officials.

²⁷ FSB is the Russian acronym for the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB).

4. Concluding remarks

76. Unlawfully deporting or transferring civilians, recognised as protected persons under international law, to another State or another location, constitutes a war crime.²⁸ International humanitarian law allows evacuations for security or imperative military reasons, but these may not involve the displacement of protected persons outside the bounds of the occupied territory.²⁹ In the investigated cases, Russian authorities have transferred or deported civilian persons outside of the occupied areas, after accusing them of carrying out activities against the Russian Federation or considering them foreign nationals or persons without nationality, respectively. These findings lead the Commission to conclude that Russian authorities have committed deportations and transfers as war crimes in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast.

77. The Commission also found that in both types of situations, Russian authorities have repeatedly carried out such acts for prolonged periods of time. This indicates that they were systematic. The evidence shows that various Russian entities, including senior officials, have acted in an organized and coordinated manner, and have thus committed transfers and deportations pursuant to a state policy. Notably, the Russian-appointed “Governor” of the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia Oblast issued a decree mandating expulsions (para. 58) and openly admitted to such acts.

78. Moreover, in the cases where Russian authorities confiscated the identity documents of the victims, they created conditions forcing them to apply for Russian passports. This is contrary to the Law of Occupation, according to which an Occupying Power has the obligation to respect the laws in force in the country, unless absolutely prevented.³⁰ Compelling foreign citizenship upon Ukrainian citizens violates international humanitarian law and the national laws of Ukraine, and therefore impacts the rights of affected persons as Ukrainians.³¹

79. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a 20 March 2025 decree of the Russian Federation stated that citizens of Ukraine who do not have legal grounds for stay (residence) in the Russian Federation must leave the territory by 10 September 2025, or regularize their legal status.³² In practice, this requires that they obtain Russian identity documents or that they leave. This raises further concern.

80. The acts of the perpetrators inflicted severe mental pain and suffering upon the victims and amount to inhuman treatment as a war crime and a human rights violation.³³ The deprivation of liberty, the use of violence or threats of violence, the absence of a genuine legal process, the separation from families, also constitute human rights violations.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

81. The Commission’s recent investigations found that recurrent attacks, by Russian armed forces, with short-range drones against multiple civilian targets on the right bank of the Dnipro River in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts, have compelled thousands to flee from the targeted areas and amount to the crime against humanity of forcible transfer of population. It also established that coordinated actions, by Russian authorities, to drive out civilians from occupied areas in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, amount to the war crimes of deportations and transfers. On the basis of the documented cases, the Commission has further concluded that Russian authorities have committed the crime against humanity of murder, the war crimes of intentionally

²⁸ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8(2)(a)(vii); Geneva Convention IV, article 49; Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, article 85(4)-(5).

²⁹ Geneva Convention IV, art. 49.

³⁰ Hague Regulations respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, 1907, article 43; Geneva Convention IV, art. 47.

³¹ Pursuant to article 92 of the Constitution of Ukraine, citizenship, the legal personality of citizens, the status of foreigners and stateless persons shall be determined exclusively by laws of Ukraine, see A/HRC/52/CRP.4, para. 693.

³² Russian Federation, Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No 159 of 20 March 2025.

³³ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 8(2)(a)(ii); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, art. 16(1).

directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects, and of inflicting inhuman treatment, as well as corresponding human rights violations.

82. In the different investigated scenarios, various Russian authorities have systematically coordinated actions to commit crimes and violations. Military units of the Russian armed forces deployed over a geographic area stretching across three oblasts, but operating under a centralized command, have targeted civilian persons and objects with drones, for over one year. Russian civil authorities in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, including the Russian-appointed “Governor”, have acted together with members of the Federal Security Service to deport or transfer Ukrainian civilians.

83. Drone attacks targeting localities in Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts killed and injured civilians, and caused large-scale damage and destruction, rendering many of these areas unlivable. The ensuing coercive environment, terror, and devastation left thousands with no other choice than to flee. Civilians who have been transferred or deported from Zaporizhzhia Oblast have been detained, at times tortured, and were placed in a coercive and threatening environment during the transfers or deportations. In all cases, the victims have been forced to give up multiple aspects of their daily lives, separated from their families and properties, while agonizing over their fate.

84. The Commission reiterates, in this regard, the importance of judicial and non-judicial forms of accountability. The non-judicial forms of accountability, including measures of truth and reparation, can contribute towards providing much needed support to the victims’ efforts to recover from traumatic events and reintegrate in society. Concerning judicial forms of accountability, investigating and prosecuting those responsible for crimes is key in ensuring accountability.

85. Recommendations made in previous reports remain relevant. The Commission sets out below specific recommendations to address issues developed in the current report.

86. The Commission recommends that the Russian Federation:

- (a) Immediately end the drone attacks targeting civilians and civilian objects;
- (b) Immediately stop all acts that spread terror among the civilian population and that lead to forcible displacement;
- (c) Ensure that all perpetrators involved in drone attacks targeting civilians and civilian objects, including those ordering, soliciting or inducing them, are held accountable, in accordance with international standards;
- (d) Immediately end transfer and deportation of civilians residing in occupied territories;
- (e) Respect international law applying to protected persons living in occupied territories, notably through ending cruel and inhuman treatment; as well as through stopping to compel foreign citizenship and take due account of the inviolability of their rights under international humanitarian law.

87. The Commission recommends that Ukraine:

- (a) Ensure that the victims of drone attacks receive the best possible physical and mental healthcare services close to the most affected areas;
- (b) Provide comprehensive support to persons who were displaced following drone attacks;
- (c) Provide comprehensive support to transferred and deported persons from occupied territories, that is tailored to their diverse situations, particularly for those who find themselves stranded abroad.

88. The Commission recommends that other States and regional and international organizations:

(a) Contribute both financially and with technical advice to the Government of Ukraine and to civil society organisations, for the provision of comprehensive support for victims and their families;

(b) For third States whose territory is the destination of persons deported from the occupied territories, undertake necessary efforts together with Ukrainian consular services to support these persons.

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