

Ukraine: Justice for the most serious crimes will promote international peace and security



24 February marks one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. To date, FIDH member organisations in Ukraine, the Center for Civil Liberties, and the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, have helped to document close to 30,000 alleged international crimes. Behind these figures are deaths and grief of thousands of victims, exacerbated by the impunity of Russia's leadership. FIDH and its members worldwide call on international institutions and governments to ramp up efforts to ensure justice in Ukraine as a means of promoting international peace and security.

One year ago, the world woke up in shock as Russia's armed forces launched a large-scale attack against Ukraine in an apparent attempt to conquer the capital Kyiv and overthrow a democratically elected government. Along with the international community, FIDH strongly condemned Russia's aggression. The offensive was resisted by Ukraine's defenders, but the suffering of the Ukrainian people was only beginning. In one year, [CCL, KHPG, and the other Ukrainian NGOs that are members of the "Tribunal for Putin" coalition, have documented approximately 30,000 incidents of alleged international crimes committed, for the most part, by the invading armed forces, including](#) summary executions, torture, unlawful confinement, ill-treatment, rape, and other sexual violence committed in areas occupied by Russia's armed forces. Many of these episodes of horrific violence have resulted in domestic investigations, in Ukraine and elsewhere, and already several

prosecutions of Russian soldiers for violations of the laws and customs of war.

[Numerous international accountability mechanisms](#) have been set up to investigate and facilitate the prosecution of possible violations of international humanitarian law, including the Independent International UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, the Organization for the Security and Cooperation (OSCE) Ukraine Monitoring Initiative, the Eurojust Joint Investigation Team and investigations by more than 10 additional national war crimes units, and international Mobile Justice Teams, among others. The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a full investigation into the situation in Ukraine in March 2022. Effective cooperation and complementarity between these mechanisms, and their meaningful engagement with victims and civil society, will be key. The ICC does not have jurisdiction over the crime of aggression with respect to the situation in Ukraine, and, due to its mandate as a Court of last resort prosecuting those most responsible, it will only investigate and prosecute a handful of cases – a tiny fraction of violations that have already been documented with the vast majority of cases left to Ukraine, and other domestic jurisdictions under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Moreover, these mechanisms will not be sufficient to root out impunity of the Russian leadership for crimes committed by Russia's armed forces, or its private militias, in Ukraine, but also in Syria, Mali, Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, and, previously, in Georgia and Chechnya. This is due to many factors, including a lack of political will and capacity to prosecute the breadth of these crimes, both domestically and internationally.

Global consequences

Meanwhile, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has not only exacerbated regional insecurity, but also led to a disruption of global food supplies, soaring inflation, and caused severe

and lasting political, economic, and social repercussions on every continent. Ukrainian refugees have sought refuge as far away as North and Latin America. Food shortages due to diminished deliveries of wheat from Ukraine have been acutely felt in countries like Lebanon, Egypt, and Indonesia. Domestic mobilization into Russia's Armed Forces has caused an exodus of Russians to Central Asia, Georgia, and Armenia, while aggressive recruitment by Russia's so-called Wagner Private Military Company has targeted individuals from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Serbia, and also Zambia and Ivory Coast. Meanwhile, human rights abuses committed by Wagner in Syria, CAR, Libya, Mozambique, and Mali remain unpunished, giving a tacit endorsement of Russia's ruthless methods in a bid to expand its influence in Africa by propping up fragile or authoritarian regimes in exchange for a license to plunder natural resources. Russia has also strengthened its ties with repressive governments in the Middle East and Asia, expanding its arms trade with Iran and Myanmar and increasing its oil exports and other forms of economic cooperation with China and Laos. This has helped Russia to soften the crippling effect of sanctions and to form an alliance of rights-abusing regimes that are emboldened by Russia's impunity to amplify repressions at home.

FIDH and its member organisations stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people

In order to promote justice more effectively in Ukraine and globally, the recurrent threat to international peace and security stemming from Russia's global pattern of abuses should be recognised and dealt with more affirmatively.

Standing in solidarity with the Ukrainian people, FIDH and its member organizations:

- Urge the Russian Federation to immediately cease its military hostilities against Ukraine, and for Belarus to

- cease its support for these actions;
- Call for strengthened cooperation and complementarity between existing accountability mechanisms looking into international crimes committed in Ukraine, and a more meaningful engagement with victims, survivors and civil society;
 - Support the call for further deliberations on other accountability mechanisms for international crimes committed in Ukraine, like a hybrid tribunal for the crime of aggression and other international crimes committed in Ukraine;
 - Call on continued condemnation of all violations of international law by all parties committed in Ukraine;
 - Call on continued condemnation and effective accountability mechanisms for violations of international law committed by Russian leadership in other situations where Russia's agents engage in acts of prohibited violence, including in Syria, Mali and CAR, underscoring the linkages between authoritarian backsliding and extraterritorial abuses;
 - Call on Ukraine and other non-State parties to ratify the ICC Statute and adopt implementing legislation enabling domestic investigations and prosecutions for international crimes; and
 - Call on the Russian authorities to stop – and the international community to make further efforts to stem – Russia's use of propaganda and abhorrent misuse of history to justify its aggression against Ukraine as a *“denazification campaign”*.