

FIDH Members Joining the People First! International Human Rights Campaign

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has created a new dimension of widespread and flagrant violations of human rights. In the course of this war, Russia, being a nuclear state and a permanent UN Security Council member, disregards all its international obligations. At least 16,000 civilian Ukrainians are regarded as missing, while being unlawfully detained in Russia.

Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians, detained in Russia due to the war, suffer torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment, including insults based on national identity and humiliation.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Russian authorities have incarcerated hundreds of Russians and nationals of other countries for anti-war statements and actions to express support for help Ukraine. Most of them have already been convicted and sentenced to long prison terms, while others are awaiting their sentences behind bars without any chance of a fair trial.

The widespread nature and gravity of human rights violations perpetrated by the Russian regime during the war triggered the launch of the PEOPLE FIRST! campaign by two Nobel Prize winners, the Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine) and Memorial (Russia), in January 2025.

This campaign, joined by about 60 organisations, has articulated several specific demands <https://people1st.online/>:

- In accordance with international law, all Ukrainian civilians captured and illegally detained by Russian forces, including those sentenced by Russian courts, should be immediately and unconditionally released and allowed to return home. Those whose homes are in Russian-controlled areas should be allowed to leave for Ukrainian government-controlled areas of the country, should they wish to do so.
- All illegally displaced or deported children should be returned to Ukraine.
- It is also essential to ensure the timely repatriation of deported Ukrainian convicts and patients of closed medical institutions, such as nursing homes and psychiatric facilities.
- All possible efforts should be made to repatriate prisoners of war as soon as possible, through exchanges or otherwise. The Geneva Conventions require that repatriation be carried out without delay after the cessation of active hostilities; however, the relevant work should be initiated immediately.
- Russian political prisoners already sentenced to prison terms or kept in pre-trial detention in connection with their anti-war statements or actions should be released and face no limits on their freedom of movement, including the freedom to travel abroad if they wish to do so.
- An independent international mechanism should be established to coordinate these processes, monitor their compliance with international humanitarian law, and ensure regular and transparent reporting on the progress made, including regular updates on the release of prisoners and adherence to humanitarian standards.
- Russia must provide immediate and full access to all the captives and all illegally transferred or deported children for the UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The participants of the campaign articulate its messages at different international platforms, publish analytical documents and information, and explain how to release people while meeting state leaders.

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The campaign's key idea that war victims must be released as a matter of priority is becoming increasingly well-known and popular. We take note of the fact that in 2025, non-combatants and prisoners of war were released more intensively. However, the speed of their release remains insufficient.

In view of the widespread nature and gravity of violations of the rights of victims of Russia's aggression, the importance of the immediate release of all people illegally detained due to the war, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), at its 42nd Congress in Bogota (Colombia), calls upon FIDH members to join the PEOPLE FIRST! campaign and advocate for the campaign's messages in their communication with international organisations, state authorities, media and civil society institutions. Amplifying the campaign's messages in the countries that maintain close cooperation with the Russian regime is of utmost importance. These include, inter alia, Brazil, India, China and other BRICS countries.

For additional information, please contact the PEOPLE FIRST! campaign at info@people1st.org