

Open Letter to the Global Civil Society from the Civil Society of Ukraine

We, the undersigned parties, are making this call in light of the Global Peace Summit and Ukraine's Peace Formula. We raise our voices in concern for the human rights abuses faced by Ukrainians held captive by Russia—both prisoners of war (POW) and civilian detainees. We call upon all parties to honour their commitments under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) to safeguard civilians and individuals no longer engaged in combat, including prisoners of war.

We want to remind that human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (UDHR, art. 1), nobody shall be subjected to torture (UDHR, art. 5), and no exceptional circumstances can justify torture or other ill-treatment (the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, art. 2). The prohibition of torture is recognized as absolute in general international law.

Fully within the framework of IHL and IHRL, our plea is the following:

1. **The following categories of Ukrainian captives held by Russia since 2014 must be urgently released:**
 - a. **Civilian detainees and children** who were forcibly displaced, detained or transferred. According to IHRL, nobody can be detained arbitrarily (without a legitimate reason). Forcible transfers and deportations of civilians are prohibited by article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
 - b. **Prisoners of war:**
 - i. **All POWs who are gravely wounded or gravely sick, or whose mental or physical well-being is endangered by captivity must be repatriated to Ukraine or accommodated in neutral country**, as guaranteed by art. 109 and 110 of the Third Geneva Convention. Available [evidence](#) and [research](#) suggest that the **very lives and well-being of captives may well be endangered by the conditions of Russian captivity. All captives endangered by inhuman conditions of captivity must be released** according to the same Convention and instruments such as mixed medical commissions (art. 112, [already created in Ukraine](#)).
 - ii. **International law must be upheld.** Russia's war of aggression must end. As soon as active hostilities cease, all prisoners of war must be released and repatriated without delay. It is imperative that everyone suspected of war crimes and other serious human rights violations is held accountable, and that crimes under international law do not remain unpunished. The cycle of impunity must be broken in full accordance with international law.
2. **Rights of all Ukrainian captives must be upheld until their eventual release.** As follows from the Third Geneva Convention, the rights of POWs include, but are not limited to, humane treatment (art. 13), adequate living conditions (art. 25), food quality and quantity (art. 26), medical care (art. 30), the right to send and receive correspondence (art. 71), to receive relief shipments (art. 72-74). To uphold these rights,

we call for unimpeded access for independent humanitarian organizations operating in Russia and in occupied Ukrainian territory to monitor the treatment of POWs (art. 125). As follows from the Fourth Geneva Convention, civilian detainees “accused of offences” also have rights to receive medical attention, adequate living conditions, and other forms of assistance and to be detained within the occupied territory (art. 76). Arbitrary detention of civilians is not permissible by international law, and they must be released unconditionally. However, until civilian detainees are released, their rights and dignity must be protected, including the absolute prohibition of ill-treatment, regardless of whether they are captive arbitrarily or not.

As we strive for an end to Russia’s aggression, we must recognize that peace can only be sustainable and just if it emerges from a foundation of justice and reparation for victims and accountability for perpetrators. We must work toward the future where human rights prevail over injustice. We must be united in our pursuit of justice, demanding accountability and ensuring that no one is forgotten.

Amnesty International Ukraine

Center for Civil Liberties

*Coalition of associations of families of missing and captured Ukrainian defenders
"SAVE UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR"*

Human Rights Center Pryncyp

Lawyers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

NGO Institute of Mass Information

Ukrainian Feminist Network for Freedom and Democracy

Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union

Ukrainian Society of Switzerland

Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement